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An Anthropological Perspective: The Cultural, the Political, and the Ontological in Kichwa Studies

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

Belinda Cherie Ramírez

Committee in charge:

Professor Nancy Grey Postero, Chair
Professor Joseph D. Hankins
Professor David E. Pedersen

2017

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2017

DEDICATION

To the many iterations of me—
throughout time, experience, and space.
May you remember this step
and what it has brought and taught you.

EPIGRAPH

"What an astonishing thing a book is. It's a flat object made from a tree with flexible parts on which are imprinted lots of funny dark squiggles. But one glance at it and you're inside the mind of another person, maybe somebody dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, an author is speaking clearly and silently inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people who never knew each other, citizens of distant epochs. Books break the shackles of time. A book is proof that humans are capable of working magic."

Carl Sagan, Cosmos, Part 11: The Persistence of Memory

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The emotions I feel upon completing this once amorphous task are complicated and contradictory: relief, insecurity, excitement, apathy, pride, unsettled. It causes me to at once be both forward- and backward-looking, as perhaps most steppingstones and crossroads do.

I am deeply grateful to those who have helped me to get to this step, however haltingly I did it. A very special thanks to my advisor and committee chair, Nancy Postero, for her guidance, support, and patience throughout this process. Her teachings and interpretations have shaped the structure and analysis of this thesis, and it would not be as complete as it is without her careful readings of earlier drafts. Thank you also to Joe Hankins, the first reader of this thesis. His empathy and listening ear came at very important moments and meant so much to me.

I would also like to thank those who have helped me get to this point in my academic career and who encouraged me to pursue academia at all. This indeed deserves thanks as well as explanations. Jacob Hickman, my undergraduate advisor, had a passion and energy for research and travel that was contagious. Janis Nuckolls, another undergraduate advisor, and her kindness were so welcoming, and her expertise introduced me to the fascinating world of Amazonia. Greg Thompson, an additional advisor and mentor during my undergraduate years, encouraged me to apply to UC San Diego and exposed me to theory and history that, for me, was life changing. As a queer, Latina, first generation college student—and these being burgeoning identities—these mentor's guidance was invaluable.

To friends who have shared pain and joy with me throughout this process, I am so incredibly grateful for your continued support and faith in me, no matter my decisions. Jared, thank you for the role you have played in this part of my life and for sharing parts of it with me. Brynna, running into you in the Amazon was a bit of a game changer and a catalyst for so many subsequent realizations. You may not know it, but I am so grateful to you for this. To my CO group pals—you shared such a hard time in life with me, and we buoyed each other up and continue to do so. It has been such a pleasure learning how to open up and be a friend with you all. To my UCSD anthropology amigxs, you are so important to me and have played such pivotal parts in my life. Thank you for your listening ears and for sharing so many growing up experiences with me. And the same to other UCSD friends—thank you.

My acknowledgements would be incomplete and paler, of course, without recognition of my family. I am thankful to my ancestors for their sacrifices and willingness to move through this mad world, which movement eventually lead to me being here. To my parents and siblings for their love, influence, and support of my bookedness, no matter how different we are. You all give me life. And a tremendous thanks to my partner, Amelia: thank you for your bravery, for your light, for your belief in and respect for me. I try to express this often, but having you as my partner makes life make so much more sense, and makes it a hell of a lot brighter. Thank you for pushing me to be better, for holding my hand, and for loving me. Now it is your turn.

Perhaps it goes without saying, but just in case it is not: any mistakes, misinterpretations, or other shortcomings found herein are completely my own.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

An Anthropological Perspective: The Cultural, the Political, and the Ontological in Kichwa Studies

by

Belinda Cherie Ramírez

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor Nancy Grey Postero

In this thesis, I argue that the anthropological study of Kichwa-speaking peoples in the Ecuadorian Amazon is characterized by two categories of analysis: one with a focus on structuralist topics of interest and the other with a decidedly political economy overtone. Through a selective literature review of each theoretical shift, I offer a critical analysis of both of these trends, examining their origins, strengths, productions, and erasures, as well as their relative successes in reflecting Kichwa self-interpretations. I

also describe how these trends build off of each other, forming, in part, out of reactions to the other's shortcomings while still falling short of either the political or religio-cultural aspects of Kichwa life. In sum, structuralism lacks emphasis on power and politics, while political anthropology tends to undermine the importance of ethnography and unique indigenous cosmologies.

Because of these limitations, I propose that the best way to bridge the gap between the structural and the political is through political ontological literature, which brings to light indigenous cosmology and radical difference while also highlighting how indigenous uniqueness is played out in the political arena. Although not without its own failings, political ontology attempts to bring together the benefits of both of these theoretical shifts without falling into their traditional traps. Political ontological analyses have been applied to indigenous peoples elsewhere in Latin America, but it has yet to be applied to lowland Kichwa. Furthermore, such an analysis is vital in order to understand anthropologists' intellectual approaches to difference, including indigeneity as difference.

INTRODUCTION

Walking through the *chagra*, or garden, of Luisa Cadena, she pointed out the different plants she had sowed, how to harvest them when matured, and what their typical uses were. It was 2015 in the Amazonian part of Ecuador, and I was visiting Luisa's small suburb of Plaza Rey on the outskirts of Puyo, the capital of Pastaza province. Never one short of words, Luisa showed us how to use our machetes as shovels to dig up taro, cassava, and potatoes, as well as how to cut cassava stalks so that they can be replanted. She told us how to peel cassava—such an important root vegetable for indigenous peoples of the Amazon—so that it could later be boiled, mashed, and fermented to become *aswa* ('*chicha'* in Spanish, or 'cassava beer'), a drink vital to Kichwa hospitality and femininity. We observed hot peppers, plantains, and *maito* leaves used for wrapping food for cooking over the fire. We took note of medicinal plants used for medical treatments and preventatives. We found *achiote* ('annatto'), a hairy plant often compared to a woman's vulva, which when opened reveals seeds coated in an orange-red paste that is used both to season foods and as a dye for bodies and clothing. Special markings and songs, Luisa explained as she applied *achiote* to our faces, help to ensure a good crop by giving respect to the spirits of the plants and the land. As part of the ritual, she took leaves and used them to gently slap the cassava stalks yet to be planted. Armed with machetes and *achiote*-painted faces, we then went to work planting the cassava stalks and harvesting other necessary foods as Luisa directed.

Later, I found myself in a community building recently built by the Pastaza municipal government. The community of Los Reyes had been chosen as part of a pilot program to implement a combination of traditional and purportedly scientifically-proven

methods of organizing, planting, and harvesting *chagras*. This program was called the *Proyecto Chacras Agroecológicas*, the Agroecological *Chagras* Project. These methods, based both in an understanding of traditional planting methods as well as local studies on plant growth and efficiency, diverged from the highly idiosyncratic and family-based methods normally used. Families of the Los Reyes community, like many other communities in the Pastaza province, had applied to receive the training and funding involved with this model *chagra* project and were one of the few lucky ones to be chosen. At the community building, community members who had implemented the model *chagra* techniques were gathered together to voice their concerns and questions to government leaders coming in from Puyo, the provincial capital. However, the community leaders seemed timid and reluctant to voice much of anything, making it apparent that other reasons for their involvement were at play—the prospect of food after the meeting, getting to rub shoulders with government leaders, merely doing what they were asked, or perhaps fulfilling obligations as part of the model *chagra* project. Another reason for the lack of community voices might have been the comparative loudness of the government ones. The prefect of the *gobierno autónomo descentralizado provincial de Pastaza* (abbreviated to GAD, 'Decentralized Autonomous Government of Pastaza'), Antonio Kubes, was rumored to be among the government cadres attending this community visit, but he turned out to be otherwise occupied. In Antonio's stead, the young and likable vice-prefect Sharon Tafur attended the community meeting, as well as many of her subordinates. Also representing the Pastaza GAD was Patrick Santi, the Director of Productive and Economic Promotion. Both Sharon and Patrick took up quite a lot of space at the meeting. Patrick—clad in very untraditional and flashy white rain

boots—especially stole the show, shouting and raising his arms in ways characteristic of charismatic leaders. He took the opportunity to discuss issues not directly related to the Agroecological *Chagra* Project, instead bringing up injustices done to Amazonian indigenous peoples by those from the highlands. These injustices included the harmful and prolific oil extraction and the unfairness of its proceeds going to benefit those on the Coast and in the Andes, leaving those that inhabit the Amazonian spaces from which oil largely comes bereft and without governmental support. These comments and complaints were especially meaningful coming from a fairly high-positioned government employee, who enjoys many more privileges and opportunities than other lower-class indigenous peoples. After the charismatic speech and an exchanging of gifts presented to the vice-prefect from the Los Reyes community, everyone involved partook in a feast of traditional lowland foods. Community members seemed more relaxed as the vice-prefect, Patrick, and other governmental representatives switched their narratives to talk and laughter about how delicious the *maito* fish was and how the two *gringas* ('white women') could not eat as much cassava as was customary.

These two moments come from my fieldwork in the Amazonian region of Ecuador. My interpretation of the two stories is meant to be emblematic of two very different ways of thinking about and approaching issues in Ecuadorian lowland Amazonia—one that focuses on the traditions and relationships to land and non-human actors within Kichwa cosmology, and one that focuses on the political projects and actors at play within a complex web of power hierarchies and dynamics. For example, the story of Luisa—portrayed as a quasi-shamanic figure knowledgeable about traditional Kichwa cosmology, ritual, and song—instills an almost romantic view of Kichwa peoples and the

importance of growing edible and medicinal plants. The second story, which also deals with *chagras* and food production, instead takes on a much more overtly political tone, focusing on extractivism, the relations and power differentials between government actors and community members, and regional power struggles on the scale of the nation-state. Scholars have centered on these very different aspects of indigenous life depending on their perspectives and theoretical approaches. The first trend that scholars have used in Kichwa ethnographies that I draw attention to I have subsumed under the category of 'structuralism', reflecting a turn within anthropology that today is often considered old-fashioned and limited in various ways. Structural anthropology contends that deep structures exist within cultures and that, therefore, there are often comparative structures across cultures. This comes from a fundamental assumption, then, that cultures are similar enough to be compared and contrasted because of the existing structures in society. Major theorists of structural anthropology include Levi-Strauss, Durkheim, and Weber—also lending to the old-fashioned stereotype of this mode of analysis. The work of these theorists tends to concentrate on ethnographic-centered experiences and descriptions, focusing on traditional anthropological concepts such as kinship, marriage, language, and religion. The sites of inquiry in these ethnographies are often small villages or kinship groups.

The second trend I emphasize that Kichwa scholars have used is called 'political anthropology', which—in opposition and response to structuralism—is characterized by a focus on power, governmentality, and heavy critique of capitalism and neoliberalism, particularly as it plays out in non-EuroAmerican societies. Political anthropology is concerned with the structure of political systems as the basis of the arrangement of

society. This trend within anthropology was borne out of the lack of emphasis on the global and political within structuralism. What political anthropologists perceived structuralism was lacking was the way various societies, countries, and groups are connected on a global scale through state and market. Major theorists in this realm of thinking are Marx, Foucault, Gramsci, and Wallerstein. The work from these theorists is much less ethnographic and more philosophical, but anthropologists have used them to analyze data from their field sites, often applying them to issues of extraction and colonialism, especially as it pertains to the Latin American context. The focus of these ethnographies is commonly on political organizations or small communities of people. This trend is characterized by thinkers and researchers generally from a more recent era, so it is often considered to be more contemporary than structural anthropology. From personal experience, it also seems that there exists a general stereotype that an emphasis on power versus religion or language, for example, is more forward-thinking and progressive since power-centered analyses deal with issues pertaining to important power differentials and hierarchies that expose radical injustices, rather than merely marveling at the intricacies of culture and language, perhaps to the extent of romanticizing them. This lends to the idea that this trend is newer, as well.

However, there is also a third trend that I will use to try to bridge the thinking between the first and second trends. This is termed ‘political ontology’, which draws from indigenous studies, science and technology studies, posthumanism, political ecology, decolonization, as well as from the fairly recent ontological turn within anthropology (Blaser 2013). Ontology within anthropology refers to the idea that multiple perspectives or worldviews (or more drastically, worlds) exist simultaneously and

overlap in interesting and complex ways. Humans can reside within one or more ontologies depending on the intersection of their history, politics, economy, and personal experience. Ontology, a recent object of study, was born from science and technology studies (STS), which emphasizes materiality and—at least as applied to anthropology—broke away from traditional conceptions of ethnography as only applying to places outside of EuroAmerica, turning the ethnographic and philosophical gaze onto science and scientists themselves. Within anthropology, ontological concerns with materiality are then applied to culture, shifting focus from identities to performances and inhabitation within physical realities and how the specificity of those unique combinations can create entirely different human experiences of the world—in fact, creating entirely differing worlds. This emphasis on multiple realities or multiple perspectives is then applied to the political realm within political ontology, emphasizing that political experiences[1] can be multiple and can be taken up in unique ways within various ontological perspectives. What is also emphasized is not *who* gets to speak or act within the political realm, as is often the highlight of political anthropology, but *what* is considered political, as in what (or which) realities take shape and which do various people come to live with? The main theorists for these strains of thought are Descola, Latour, and Strathern, among others. A major critique of this trend, however, is that it may merely be a rehash of what anthropologists call 'culture', a term that seems to have lost popularity because of its ambiguity and abstractness (Trouillot 2003). In other words, this may be a more complex

[1] It is important to recognize, however, that as author de la Cadena (2010) analyzes, 'politics' originates from Western ideologies of liberalism, democracy, and nature-culture dichotomies, in some ways creating tensions between indigenous ontologies and Western politics, while it is also utilized to communicate indigenous demands with the nation-state.

and jargon-filled way to talk about cultural difference. I will discuss more about this critique later in this paper.

These trends are especially highlighted in my research on Kichwa studies, particularly as researchers attempt to define and deal with difference. In this thesis, I argue that Kichwa studies are characterized by two categories of literature and analysis: one with a focus on structuralist topics of interest and the other with a decidedly political anthropology overtone. The first group lacks emphasis on power and politics, while the latter tends to undermine the importance of ethnography and unique indigenous cosmologies. I propose that the best way to bridge the gap between these two literary camps is through political ontological literature, which brings to light indigenous cosmology and radical difference while also highlighting how their uniqueness is played out in the political arena. Although political ontological analyses have been applied to indigenous peoples elsewhere in Latin America, it has yet to be applied to lowland Kichwa peoples. Such an analysis would, I believe, allow for a better, more holistic understanding of Kichwa peoples, making it a worthwhile anthropological goal. Additionally, it is vital to understand anthropologists' intellectual approaches to difference, including indigeneity as difference.

Making this argument is especially important because of the contributions it makes not only to Kichwa studies, but also to the discipline of anthropology in general. Indigenous studies scholars and anthropologists since the beginning of the discipline have attempted to grapple with the issue of difference in various ways. Because indigenous peoples since colonization have been so severely othered and erased, in the contemporary period they are made the subjects of inquiries into modernity, coloniality, and Western

ideologies, all in an attempt to understand how this difference between 'us' (the Western, white settlers) and 'them' (the indigenous others) can be explained, understood, and dealt with. Are indigenous peoples merely extremely foreign, with similar underlying cultural structures to others, as structuralism would say? Are they similar enough to engage in political engagements and organization just as Westerners would, as political anthropology suggests? Or are they so different from Westerners that they are basically unintelligible, only able to be understood through their expertise with partial connections and translations, as some ontological analyses would propose? These questions and the trends that they reflect within the discipline of anthropology are of course concomitantly reflected in Kichwa studies.

Chapter Overviews

In order to make this argument and approach these questions I describe these three trends within the literature and apply them to Kichwa studies. I first begin with an historical analysis, explaining who the Kichwa are, their history within Amazonian Ecuador, their language and their relations to surrounding indigenous groups. I also lay out a background of Kichwa peoples (and other indigenous groups in Ecuador) in relation to the Ecuadorian state, including indigenous social movements and the precedence for political organizing and mobilization in Ecuador and Latin America in general.

Then I delve into the three main sections of my analysis, which synthesize both literature review and data analysis. My data are works drawn from Kichwa studies for the first two sections and from anthropological literature in general for the last section. The first section is the 'old' literature, or structuralist literature, as I described before. I look at

works by Kohn (2005; 2007; 2013), Nuckolls (1993; 2010), Uzendoski (1995; 2005a; 2005b; 2008), Whitten, Jr. (1978; 2008; see also Whitten, Jr., Whitten, and Chango 1997), and Swanson (2009). These authors deal with Kichwa ethnography and language. After outlining these authors and some exemplary works that show how they fit (and how they do not) under the structuralist heading, I provide the critique that this traditional approach most obviously lacks mention of power and contestation, focusing nearly solely on culture, religion, and cosmology. It also tends to instill a static or othering view of indigenous peoples, not seeing them as modern or political.

The second section is the 'new' literature, or political anthropological literature. I look at works by Sawyer (2004) and Erazo (2014)—authors that deal with Kichwa and broadly indigenous Ecuadorian issues of extraction, political organization, leadership, and relations to the state and NGOs. As in the previous section, I then provide a critique, stating that this group of authors and literature is very much a reaction to the old literature, which was seen as not political enough and without an understanding of the role of power in indigenous lives. The emphasis on power and contestation in the new literature leaves out a focus on culture and attempts to subsume indigenous culture too much into non-indigenous culture, perhaps over-politicizing them. This highlights the interesting oscillations between whether or not indigenous peoples are more or less akin to Westerners.

The final section serves as a bridge between these two trends, and through it I attempt to argue that applying political ontology to Kichwa studies is beneficial because it draws on the strengths and weaknesses of both of the previous trends. This literature is characterized by a blending of political anthropology's concerns with power and

contestation and the structuralist literature's concerns with cosmology, ritual, and human-nonhuman relations. An analysis of these texts is productive because of the unique blend of politics in the form of social organizing and indigenous social movements seen in Ecuador today, with indigenous actors presenting both their traditional culture and political prowess simultaneously. For this section I pull from Blaser (2009; 2010; 2013; 2014; 2016) and de la Cadena (2010; 2015). These are important theorists to use in particular because they attempt to combine the political and the ontological as it applies to indigenous peoples. Furthermore, I tie political ontology back to its roots in decolonization theory as a way to move the literature forward and to shift away from its romanticizing and essentializing tendencies.

Finally, in my conclusion I refocus on the critiques of these three trends outlined, including those of ontology and its intellectual descendants. These critiques serve to highlight that my argument is not necessarily foolproof, but it does have merit for the reasons previously outlined. Additionally, especially important are the 'partial connections' de la Cadena (2015) evokes from Strathern's (2004) work, which theoretically make intelligibility between ontologies possible. In other words, following this model, non-indigenous peoples *can* understand indigenous peoples' ontologies, at least to some extent and through a process fraught with translation errors and equivocations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Andes in South America are home to the Quechua people and language group, those of the great pre-Colombian Inca Empire. At the time of colonization, the pre-Colombian peoples of this area spoke a wide array of languages, many of which were not mutually intelligible. In order to facilitate colonization and communication, the conquistadors and Catholic missionaries dispersed and encouraged use of the Quechua language since they found that it was an easy language for the indigenous people to learn and speak. This proved useful in missionary efforts and in the evangelizing of the native population (Ortiz Arellano 2001, 35-36). Today, Quechua-speaking peoples total some 9-14 million people living throughout the Andean regions in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. The Ecuadorian varieties of the Quechua language are referred to as 'Kichwa' and its speakers number only 2.5 million. Kichwa is also spoken in the lowland regions of Ecuador. Although ultimately it is uncertain how this highland language came to be spoken in the Amazon basin, it is thought that precolonial trade between highland and lowland groups contributed to the eastward spread of Kichwa, as well as missionary efforts by Catholic priests after the Conquest.

I conduct my research among Ecuadorian Kichwa-speaking peoples, also known as Runa (the Kichwa term for 'people'). Kichwa people make up the most populous indigenous group in Ecuador, spanning across the highland and Amazonian regions of the country. My interest lies specifically with lowland Kichwa language and peoples residing in the Amazon, where there are about 419 organized communities spread out across the eastern third of the country. Lowland Kichwa communities can also be found across national borders in Colombia and Peru. Additionally, they were one of the first

Ecuadorian indigenous groups to organize politically in the early 1980s. This led eventually to one of the most successful indigenous social movements in Latin America, known as the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE). Kichwa tend to be farmers, and although much more could be said about Kichwa political organization and sociocultural background, for the purposes of this paper it will suffice to say that Kichwa traditional cosmology can be categorized as animist. Shamanic practices supplemented with hallucinogenic substances such as *ayawaska* are common, as well as healing ceremonies using medicinal plants.

Although estimates differ, Indians make up about 35% of the Ecuadorian population, with 95% of those coming from the Andean regions. Due in large part to this big indigenous population, multiculturalism and plurinationality have been major themes in Ecuadorian history, and they are largely tied up with indigenous social movements. One of the earliest indigenous organizations to come about in Ecuador was *La Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios* ('The Federation of Ecuadorian Indians'), which was created in the 1940s with the help of the Communist Party, but its beginnings can be traced back to as early as the 1920s (Lluco 2005). The more commonly recited history, however, is that the Shuar Amazonian indigenous group was the first to organize in Ecuador in 1961, creating the *Federación de Centros Shuar* ('Central Shuar Federation'). The transition in 1979 from military rule to democracy then paved the way for indigenous movements to arise (Zamosc 2007). Several Kichwa groups followed the Shuar's example and made their own organizations, and in 1981 the Kichwa and Shuar groups merged, forming the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana* ('Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon',

CONFENIAE), which then recruited from other regions and indigenous groups (such as the Cofán and Huaorani). This confederation then met with Ecuarunari, one of the largest and oldest (since 1972) Andean Indian organizations. This coordination formed the *Consejo de Coordinación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* ('Coordinating Council of Ecuadorian Indigenous Nationalities', CONACNIE). In 1986, they then merged at a national level and changed the name to the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* ('Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador'), or CONAIE. According to Macdonald, Jr., this merger "linked the Amazon region with groups from the highlands and coast with similar concerns—land rights, respect for culture, and representation within a pluricultural nation" (2002, 177).

In 1996 CONAIE branched out from indigenous social movement to direct political representation with the *Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik* ('Movement for Plurinational Unity Pachakutik'), or just Pachakutik. In the 1990s the Pachakutik party pushed for a project called the Political Constitution of the Plurinational State of Ecuador. The push for plurinationality and pluriculturalism led in 1998 to the constitution being changed to officially recognize Ecuador as a pluricultural and multiethnic state, written as, "a State based on the social rule of law: sovereign, united, independent, democratic, pluricultural and multiethnic" (Flor Recalde 2005, 100). This was hailed as an important change for the wellbeing and inclusivity of indigenous peoples into the Ecuadorian state, but of course it has not come without its own disadvantages and troubles since it became a part of the national rhetoric. Conflicts began to arise between Pachakutik, CONAIE, FEINE (the *Consejo de Indígenas Evangélicos del Ecuador*, 'Council of Evangelical Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of

Ecuador'), and other organizations serving native peoples. Although a successful indigenous uprising deposed president Mahuad in 2000, the indigenous movement later became coopted by the state and other political groups, thereby decentralizing its power and causing it to be less effective. More recently, indigenous groups have also accused current president Correa of intentionally fragmenting their organizations in order to weaken their role as social movements with the power to check his government. Many indigenous organizations resent Correa for coopting their interests in plurinationalism, S*umak Kawsay* ('*Buen Vivir*' or 'good living'), and anti-neoliberal practices, seeing him not as a supporter of indigenous peoples but rather attempting to advance his own neoliberal agenda under the guise of leftist socialism.

Although much more could be said to further nuance and fill out the history of Ecuadorian indigenous people, their political and social movements, and their relations to the Ecuadorian state, this brief history and emphasis on Kichwa leadership and political involvement illustrates the ways in which democracy, liberalism, and modernity have influenced Kichwa practices and social organization. This is important to understand because the three trends within anthropology that I highlight in this paper encourage us to see Kichwa people within particular frames of reference: religion or cosmology ('culture'), politics, and a combination of the two. Of course there are multiple ways to interpret Kichwa history, social structure, and political involvement, but these two trends—culture and politics—also have historical and contemporary precedence. This shapes not only academic understandings of Kichwa peoples, but also Kichwa interpretations of their own history and politics. Therefore, although subsuming all Kichwa practices under the dichotomizing lenses of cosmology and politics is certainly

essentializing, there is a history and power behind these frames of reference that lend them force and applicability. In other words, this is not merely an academic imposition of certain concepts or theories to Kichwa studies, it is also reflected in what one sees on the ground in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

FIRST TREND: THE 'OLD' LITERATURE OF THE STRUCTURALISTS

The extant literature on Runa peoples would not be considered vast, but it is certainly growing as more research on Runa peoples is conducted. Much of the existing literature could be lumped together with traditional ethnographies on Amazonian tribes and peoples, focusing on cosmology, epistemology, and social structure and organization. Much of this could be subsumed under the structuralist theoretical heritage label, in which relationships of contrast between elements in a conceptual system reflect patterns underlying a superficial diversity. Much of this literature is influenced by early anthropology's founding theorists, such as Levi-Strauss, Durkheim, and Mauss. And drawing from the heritage of structuralism—based in part on structural linguistics—many of the texts in this field also have a strong focus on the Kichwa language as a site for understanding Runa cosmology and society. Much of this comes from a linguistic anthropology background, while others (Uzendoski's work, especially) focuses instead on the literary analysis of Kichwa narratives.

Some of the material within Runa studies, however, is firmly rooted in the political economy literature that draws from Foucauldian and Gramsican theoretical heritages and which was largely influenced by identity politics during the 1980s and 1990s. As I explained above, this trend was in part borne out of reactions to the shortcomings of structuralist ethnographies, largely leaving behind the perceived ambiguous notion of 'culture' and instead emphasizing power, political strategies, and dynamics. As applied to the Kichwa literature, this trend within anthropology has happened more recently and mostly within the last

few years. For this reason, political anthropological literature can be deemed as a 'newer' anthropological approach or theoretical trend when compared to the seemingly old-fashioned take endorsed by structuralist authors. In the next section I delve more deeply into this political literature and describe the ways in which it departed from the interests and foci of structuralist literature, as well as its shortcomings and its role in helping set the stage for the subsequent trend I focus on: political ontology. The current section, however, is meant to sketch out structuralist approaches within Kichwa studies and their benefits and drawbacks.

Theorizing with Eduardo Kohn

To begin, I outline some of the important and pertinent-to-this-paper literature on Runa peoples and how it emphasizes a general understanding of Runa culture and cosmology (ontology) versus Runa political engagement with the Ecuadorian nation-state. Although this is certainly not an exhaustive list, it serves to give an understanding of the most important authors within this heritage of Runa scholarship and their work. Furthermore, although I am juxtaposing this literature against what I am terming the political anthropology literature, there is, of course, much overlap between the two categories. The structuralist literature, for instance, often *does* involve itself with matters of politics by way of indigenous social movements and political economy, but this is generally merely to serve as historical background and context rather than serving as the main thrust of the argument. Instead, matters of cosmology, ritual, and social structure are the foci of this work.

We start with Eduardo Kohn, a recent and very influential writer and thinker who has been making waves in the anthropological community over the past few years, even winning the American Anthropological Association's book award in 2014 for his book *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology beyond the Human* (2013). His work and theories have followed the trend of using Amazonian ethnography to speak to theories of animal-human relations, science and technology studies, and ontological matters. Before the popularity of his book, however, Kohn wrote a few influential articles that began to set up his arguments concerning an anthropology of life and human-nonhuman relations.

His 2005 article "Runa Realism: Upper Amazonian Attitudes to Nature Knowing", for instance, deals with Runa ontology and epistemology. This essay is an attempt to get at local experiences of knowing nature in the Upper Amazon, how such experiences are shared, and how a study of local attitudes towards knowing can help researchers to arrive at a better understanding of the relationship between knowledge and the world more generally. This is largely manifest in ecological understandings not easily understood from the Western perspective. Kohn argues that these understandings are achieved through a poetic language rich in iconic and indexical signs and lacking in symbolic ones, to use Peirce's terms. He suggests that iconically and indexically rich modes of communicating experience better reflect the world in which they exist and are more susceptible to the qualities and events of the world. Therefore, iconic and indexical methods of communicating have a strong influence on engaging with the nonhuman realm, acquiring knowledge of the world, and establishing a certain

kind of interpersonal social intimacy. The point of this article, as well as the next one I will discuss, is to better grasp the way Runa see and interact with the world around them. Kohn shares several personal and ethnographic stories, as well as some linguistic analyses, to help illustrate his points. These emphases highlight the kind of literature Kohn's work falls in line with, namely those that stress epistemology (and to some extent ontology, in Kohn's case) and semiotics.

Another very important article by Kohn is his "How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Nature and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement" (2007). This innovative article stresses what Kohn refers to as an 'anthropology of life', which deals with reaching beyond the human in ethnographic practices as a way to better and more holistically understand them. He calls for developing an anthropology that is not just confined to the human, but is concerned with the effects of our 'entanglements' with other kinds of living selves. Kohn argues that by studying ourselves with our own tools, we miss vital perspectives and relationships that could tell us what it means to be human. To illustrate this, he gives a wonderful literary account of an ethnographic experience dealing with the death of three dogs caused by a jaguar and the surprising absence of dreams. Although seemingly simple, this story leads to a complex analysis of Runa analytical frameworks and transspecies relations. This point of view, I believe, is critical for understanding the Runa worldview because it is so intrinsically intertwined with the more-than-humans (plants and animals) of the Amazon. Kohn invites researchers to move anthropology beyond 'the human', both as an analytic and as a bounded object of study. This argument, then, relies on an understanding of

semiosis and what it means to be a 'self'. Kohn pulls from Viveiros de Castro's (2004) notion of 'perspectival multinaturalism', which works on two interlocking assumptions: 1) all sentient beings, be they spirit, animal, or human, see themselves as persons; and 2) although all beings see themselves as persons, the ways in which they are seen by other beings depend on the ontological makeup of both observer and observed. Deriving from this perspectival multinaturalism and how it applies to Runa epistemology comes the concept of 'becoming other' as a dangerous way to cross species barriers, often through the use of hallucinogens such as *ayawaska*. This approach blurs the lines and the hierarchy normally inherent in human-animal relations, with humans inevitably at the top. Kohn goes on to explain surprising and intriguing facets of these major tenets, all of which help to ethnographically and philosophically support his push for an anthropology of life.

These articles lead us to Kohn's seminal work *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (2013). This piece has created some waves in the world of anthropology, contributing to a current phenomenon dubbed 'the ontological turn'. Thinkers and writers such as Phillipe Descola, Bruno Latour, Marshall Sahlins, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Marilyn Strathern, and others seem to be the forerunners in this 'debate', with much emphasis being put on Amazonian and Melanesian ethnography as a way to highlight this new way of thinking. To focus back on Kohn, however, his purpose in *How Forests Think* is to try to make an anthropology that has as its object of study the relationships that exist between different kinds of living selves, human and

nonhuman. He rethinks our common assumptions about the nature of representation and explores how this changes anthropological concepts, which leads to what he calls an 'anthropology beyond the human', just as he wrote about in the article mentioned above (7).

In order to develop a more robust analytic for human-nonhuman relations, Kohn stresses the innate troubles existing in current ethnographic methods, namely that sociocultural anthropology uses attributes that are distinctive to humans in order to understand humans. "In this process," he writes, "the analytical object becomes isomorphic with the analytics" (6). Instead, he urges that an ethnographic focus not just on humans or animals but on how humans and animals relate would "break open the circular closure that otherwise confines us when we seek to understand the distinctively human by means of that which is distinctive to humans" (6). The connections between this and his earlier article already described are apparent.

Kohn typifies his approach by bringing to the fore certain ethnographic experiences—such as a hunter felling a palm tree in order to frighten a monkey out of its hiding place, or giving dogs *ayawasca* in order to make communication possible between species and between worlds—and then using those experiences as a way to amplify the theoretical argument he makes throughout the book. In so doing, Kohn's work challenges our notion of what can be considered an ethnography. Kohn even states that *How Forests Think* is not an ethnography of Runa people per se, but is rather a product of 'sylvan thinking': "the Amazon's many layers of life amplify and make apparent these greater than human webs of semiosis" (42). It is, as the author writes, "a book, ultimately, about thought" (21). This approach perhaps inevitably makes the work ethnographically flimsy,

particularly when compared to what might be considered ‘traditional’ ethnographies. But it is apparent that the thinking in the book is based quite deeply in ethnographic experience with humans and nonhumans alike.

Each chapter highlights an aspect of what an anthropology beyond the human might look like and how it might be approached. Short ethnographic experiences explaining pre-symbolic sign processes that span the human-nonhuman divide serve as expositions for each chapter, giving fodder for the arguments Kohn makes within them. The author also takes time during the first chapter to explain Peircian semiotics, derived from the 19th-century philosopher and logician Charles Sanders Peirce, which Kohn then uses and explains throughout the book. Kohn explains Peirce’s categorization of signs as icons, indices, and symbols, and introduces his triadic relation between signs, objects, and interpretants. Already a confusing and difficult-to-grasp concept, Kohn seems to fall short of clarifying these ideas for the readers, especially if this is one’s first exposure to Peircian semiotics. However, with some background research into this topic, Kohn’s ethnographic vignettes and explanations seem to flesh out Peirce’s concepts and apply them to the real world. This type of semiosis serves as the foundation for understanding and evaluating the author’s main argument, which is, in part, that attributing meaning to the world is not a purely human endeavor (20).

As will be explained in the third main section of this paper, ontological anthropology and the ontological turn are vital for reconciling the structuralist and political literatures within anthropology. Although Kohn’s works are certainly a part of the ontological turn—especially his book and especially because he draws from works central to authors of the ontological turn, such as Viveiros de Castro, Descola, and

Strathern—they can also fall into the category of structuralist literature because of their emphasis on deep structures within Runa culture that make it intelligible not only across cultures but also across species and worldviews. Furthermore, Kohn's works are decidedly non-political, focusing instead on subjectivity and cosmology, items of great interest to structuralist authors. A major critique of the ontological turn is that it is merely a rehash of the ambiguous 'culture' that structuralists were so fond of,[2] and so in this way—if we are to accept this critique as basically true—then Kohn's work fits nicely with the other structuralist authors listed here.

Linguistics with Janis Nuckolls

Moving on from the anthropological texts that I am using to serve as exemplars of structuralist Runa literature, it would be amiss to not mention the more linguistic anthropological literature that also makes up a big part of Runa scholarship. This, in large part, is headed by Janis Nuckolls, a linguistic anthropologist, and is also touched on by Tod Swanson and Michael Uzendoski. To a large extent, these works analyze the lowland Kichwa language in order to reveal or support aspects of Runa epistemology, particularly as it pertains to human-nonhuman relations and issues of animacy.

For instance, in Janis Nuckolls' article "The Semantics of Certainty in Quechua and its Implications for a Cultural Epistemology" (1993), she contends that the suffix *–mi* in Kichwa does not refer only to direct or first-hand experience, but rather that it serves a

[2] Though it is important to note that cultural relativists have also been very critical of structuralism for its lack of concern with human individuality, especially when dealing with structural 'rationality', which depicts all human thought as uniform and invariable (Rubel and Rosman 1996).

status-like or modal function as well as an evidential function. In other words, she argues that the most basic function of the suffix *–mi* is to mark what the speaker of an utterance asserts. As I know from my own studies of the Kichwa language, this definition is in contrast somewhat with the suffix *–shi*, which is used to mark the assertions of others. As the paper mentions, it is also in contrast with the suffix *–chu*, which is used for negation. Nuckolls describes evidentiality as the ways in which speakers of different languages make clear their basis for asserting something. Evidentiality is considered from two perspectives: 1) evidential markers may indicate a speaker's attitude regarding the validity of certain information; and 2) evidentially-marked utterances may indicate how knowledge or information was acquired. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to help dissect the evidential system of the Quechua language family and to describe how that system is reflected in the cultural epistemology of the speakers. Nuckolls describes the various modal functions of *–mi*, which are assertive. These include *–mi*, which is used to judge or evaluate, to announce, to threaten, to predict, to hope for, to distinguish new from already known information, to focus, to distinguish primary from secondary focus, to state 'But X', and to state 'Therefore X'. She then describes the evidential functions of *–mi*, which are used to report a speaker's point of view. This is where *–mi* and *–shi* oppose each other to describe personal versus an 'other's' point of view. Nuckolls then delves into an anthropological and sociolinguistic description of why prior theories about the use of the suffix *–mi* are culturally biased and fail to look outside of the EuroAmerican perspective, further emphasizing how the Runa worldview differs significantly from our own. This argument underlines a tension between structuralism and ontology, as alluded to above, in that the first seems to stress sameness (with

superficial diversity) while the latter stresses difference. However, the works described here—while often overlapping with ontological literature and analyses to some extent—maintain that Runa culture is comprised of deep structures that make it intelligible and therefore comparable at some level to differently structured cultures. This again takes us back to the question of difference as applied to indigenous peoples: are they really so different from non-indigenous peoples, or are any perceived differences merely superficial?

Another article from Nuckolls is "The Sound-symbolic Expression of Animacy in Amazonian Ecuador" (2010). This article is concerned with the concept of animacy as evidenced in Kichwa sound symbolism. This, of course, ties in with Kohn's ethnographic accounts about perspectival multinaturalism, personhood, and self. The article focuses on Kichwa-speaking Runa and seeks linguistic evidence for animacy by examining the sound-symbolic properties of a class of expressions called 'ideophones', or words that are used to describe the action of something by mimicking the sound of that action itself. This analysis of ideophones is largely what Nuckolls is known for in Runa scholarship. Nuckolls argues that the structural features of ideophones—such as canonical length, diversity of sound segments, and type of sound segments—help express the animism of the Runa lifeworld. Furthermore, she argues, these features may be indicative of a scalar or hierarchical view of animacy. These ideophones, then, are one way that Runa are interrelated with the nonhuman world. The ideophones are not merely trivial sound effects to describe factual events, but rather are tied to a deeper cultural disposition to endow all forms of life with a subjective perspective and an ability to communicate. They endow nonhuman life with an aliveness, which is a defining feature of animacy. And, of

course, the relative aliveness of various types of species is scalar—some species have more animacy than others in the Runa worldview. Moreover, animacy as a cosmological construct allows Runa to not only endow nonhuman nature with a perspective, but it also allows Runa to inhabit various perspectives on nonhuman nature. Nuckolls gives many examples to show various types of ideophones and even describes how the number of syllables for each is reflective of the animacy of the plant or animal in question. Overall, the issues of perspectival logic and deixis are strongly reflected in this paper.

Although Nuckolls certainly has many other works dedicated to the analysis of the Kichwa language, one final Nuckolls piece I will mention here is a conference paper she co-authored with Tod Swanson (n.d.). Titled "'Runa cannot be destroyed; We will always be Runa' and other examples of anti-hypotheticalism among Amazonian Quichua people", this conference presentation reveals an interesting facet of the Runa worldview in which abstractions are used much less widely than they are used in Western traditions. In fact, Nuckolls and Swanson refer to this anti-hypotheticalism as 'concrete orientation', which privileges the contextualization of utterances, thoughts, and ideas to such an extent that typification and generality are avoided. This, of course, ties into Viveiros de Castro's concept of perspectival multinaturalism, in which all sentient beings have a subjective perspective. Concrete orientation is reflected not only in normal speech—which usually appears as confusion concerning hypothetical questions or (seemingly unnecessarily) contextualizing responses to hypothetical questions—but also in ideophones, like those mentioned in Nuckolls' other works. Nuckolls defines ideophones as words that use sound to depict, illustrate, or simulate a concrete experience of some kind. Again in this

paper, Nuckolls explains how ideophones imbue nonhuman life with a certain level of animacy.

Dissecting Narratives with Michael Uzendoski and Tod Swanson

An additional well-known Runa scholar is Michael Uzendoski, an anthropologist currently working at FLACSO Ecuador. Like Nuckolls, his work also takes a more linguistic approach, though his emphasis is often more literary. Because Uzendoski is so well known within Runa studies, his monographs and other works serve as major sources of ethnographic knowledge of Kichwa-speaking Runa peoples. An earlier work of his is the article "Twins and Becoming Jaguars: Verse Analysis of a Napo Quichua Myth Narrative" (1999). This article is characterized by a literary and linguistic analysis of a Kichwa myth narrative. Uzendoski analyzes the relations of verse and structure as they contribute to drama and the unfolding of theme in the myth narrative. The author researches the major organization and grammatical features of the narrative at the level of lines, verses, stanzas, scenes, and acts. In fact, the narrative's theme, 'becoming a jaguar', is expressed through a rhetorical logic of *onset*, *ongoing*, and *outcome* that unfolds as a synecdochic relation between 'the twins', humans, and mythical jaguars. This narrative illustrates the poetic dynamics used to depict the jaguar as a powerful concept or sign in Napo Kichwa cosmology and religion, as the jaguar is understood to be very important to many South American indigenous groups. This article, although technical, broke new ground in trying to understand how Kichwa narratives are structured and the underlying purposes for the organization and its concomitant symbolism.

A later literary piece by Uzendoski is his “Somatic Poetry in Amazonian Ecuador” (2008). The title for this article is quite appropriate, not only for the topics discussed therein, but also for the way in which Uzendoski writes, which is very poetic and ethnographic. In this article, he explores two healing ceremonies, one in Ecuador and the other in Peru. He argues that these experiences can be theorized through the idea of somatic poetry, which involves the listening, feeling, smelling, seeing, and tasting of natural subjectivities, and not just those emanating from human speech or from the human mind. Uzendoski defines ‘somatic poetry’ as the process of making and experiencing beauty so that life and the story become part of the same thread. He discusses how somatic poetry involves drama and coauthoring with nonhuman natural beings, including spirits or *supai*. This is because in Amazonian cosmology communicative action is not limited to humans but also includes spirits and beings from the nonhuman natural world. He mentions that lines that loop through past lives, history, myth, the body, and the myriad subjectivities of the Amazonian landscape constitute somatic poetry. This source is a wonderful ethnographic account that gives insight into Runa worldview and culture through perhaps anthropologically uncommon means.

Uzendoski’s work fits the structuralist model quite well, emphasizing cosmology, narratives and mythology, and Runa relations with nonhuman others. This last part is a particularly important classifier for Kichwa studies because of the frequency of talking about human-nonhuman relations in Amazonian literature. As we will see later, the political anthropology literature does not broach this subject at all, except maybe in describing some ethnographic oddity. The structuralist and ontological literatures, however, are overtly concerned with the animacy of nonhuman actors within the Runa

worldview and the ways in which that is evidenced in Kichwa speech, cosmology, and practice.

A further example of this concern lies with Tod Swanson's article, "Singing to Estranged Lovers: Runa Relations to Plants in the Ecuadorian Amazon" (2009). Swanson's article examines Runa relations to plants through analyzing ritual songs to plants as well as gardening behavior. He argues that plants are treated like dangerous lovers or difficult children. To discover the reason why this might be the case, Swanson analyzes several plant species origin myth stories, such as *Manduru* and *Huituc*. From this analysis, he finds that, according to Runa thinking, the plant species seem to have evolved from a previously human state in which plants were lovers or children that became estranged. This estrangement, which causes the species shifting, is triggered by a major fault called *quilla*, which means 'laziness' and 'sexual looseness'. Upon transforming from a *quilla* person to a plant or animal, the individual is then able to fulfill their full potential or purpose and they are no longer considered *quilla*, although humans continue to refer to them as such. In fact, it is by becoming another species that they are able to coexist with human beings in a productive exchange because humans strive to not be lazy, but rather a *sindzhi aicha yaya* ('strong meat father') or a *sindzhi chagra mama* ('strong garden mother'). Therefore, the barriers between species created in the acts of transformation are thus believed to be good and, according to Runa, they are what make the world habitable. This article does a fabulous job at explaining key Kichwa concepts that are vital to understanding Runa culture and society, which is again a main concern in this first trend of anthropology and Kichwa studies.

Looking at Structures with Uzendoski and the Whittens

Moving away from literary, narrative, and linguistic analyses, another grouping of literature within the structural anthropology trend in Kichwa studies emphasizes history, culture, tradition, and social organization. Uzendoski writes prolifically on these subjects in addition to those on Runa narratives, showing his versatility in different research strategies and approaches. Another important author is Norm Whitten, Jr., a well-known Kichwa scholar who worked mostly during the 1970s and 80s and paved the way for many subsequent researchers in Ecuador among its Indian populations. As will be shown, Whitten, Jr.'s work also incorporates an understanding of leftist political organization among Ecuadorian indigenous groups, noting a shift away from culture and cosmology toward politics and power. Whitten, Jr.'s work, therefore, serves as a bridge between the two major trends I highlight in this paper. But first, let us explore more of Uzendoski's work on Amazonian indigeneity.

Uzendoski's article "The Horizontal Archipelago: The Quijos/Upper Napo Regional System" (2004) uses an analysis of ethnohistorical sources and data, including archaeological evidence, to explore the principles of exchange and markets in the upper Napo region in Ecuador. Long-distance exchange, markets, and verticality represent significant aspects of social organization that can be found in historical sources. He argues that local and regional exchanges followed a social logic where human transactions such as marriage—not 'commercial goods'—were the most important transactions. He suggests that the Napo lowland and highland societies were similar in structure, contrasting with the more hierarchical social orders of the central and southern Andes. This paper gives a wonderfully detailed history of the peoples and interactions

that might have taken place centuries ago in the Napo region. It stresses the importance of the Napo province as an Amazonian trading post and provides excellent background context to the region where I do my fieldwork.

Another pertinent article written by Uzendoski is titled "Making Amazonia: Shape-shifters, Giants, and Alternative Modalities" (2005a). This article in part serves as a review of eight books written about peoples living in the Amazon. Uzendoski ties all eight of these books together with various threads that are integral to understanding the cultures of the Amazon, and meanwhile he argues a point using the books as evidence. This point, he writes, is that rather than define Amazonian people and cultures by what they lack or how they are constrained, these books show how Amazonian peoples create their worlds not just by what is 'given', but by what must be made. His main argument is that Amazonia is a place at the fore of 'alternative modernities', or sites of creative adaptation by which people question the present order by way of cultural knowledge.[3] In Amazonia, this questioning and its ensuing struggles are focused upon issues of the sociality of nature. On the one hand, modernity objectifies nature as a domain of extractable resources. On the other, Amazonian perspectives insist that nature is a living and sentient being whose actions and multiple personalities impact the daily lives of human actors in complex ways. Uzendoski then analyzes the books according to various topics, including

[3] This is similar to Blaser's (2010) argument about multiple modernities, many of which provide alternatives to the hegemonic, Western version of modernity.

Amazon social philosophies, historicity, regional systems, race, ecology, and values.

This article comes very close to discussing issues important to authors of political ontology, which I use to bridge the gap between structuralist and political anthropology literature. Uzendoski dubs the Amazon as a site for alternative modalities to nature-knowing to flourish, which can be seen not only in day-to-day cosmological traditions—like that highlighted in the first vignette with Luisa Cadena at the beginning of this paper—but also in indigenous politics, which can be seen in the analyses of de la Cadena and Blaser below. In all, however, each trend that I highlight in this paper emphasizes the importance of Amazonian studies because of the role of indigenous peoples in encouraging these alternative modalities, whether it be to capitalism, Western nature-knowing, or gardening. Furthermore, this again emphasizes the theme of approaches to difference within anthropology, especially as it pertains to indigenous peoples as different. Indeed, difference is the main site of defining indigeneity, as native peoples are generally understood in opposition to peoples of the West.

A final and yet highly significant work by Uzendoski is his book *The Napo Runa of Amazonian Ecuador* (2005b). This is a fascinating book about the Napo Runa in Ecuador, their lifestyles, their cosmology, and their epistemology. As Uzendoski writes in the introduction, the book is virtually a collection of his articles organized and edited together as a book. In this work, the author concerns himself largely with the concept of value. He writes that a beginning definition of value might be the "chains that link relations between things to relations between

people" (Gregory 1997, 12). He continues, writing that values are contained not in things by themselves, but only in a total social context of people and things. He argues that value is not given in nature, but rather produced by human action and intentionality.

Uzendoski provides a great ethnographic setting near the beginning of his book that lays out the context of the Napo area and his own personal relationships (his wife is Runa). He mentions that to assume that Napo Runa socioculture is simply disappearing in the face of the dominant culture is misinformed.[4] Instead, a more useful concept for describing Amazonian Kichwa social process is transculturation, which can be defined as "a shift in ethnic identity through intermarriage," and has roots in the fluid dynamics of Andean and Amazonian cultures (Reeve 1985, 16).

The first chapter discusses the birth process and the development of the will, and how that defines a *sindzhi runa* ('strong Runa person'). He describes personhood according to Runa mentality—what he refers to as a 'completed person'. What makes a completed person is being hard and strong, which is achieved through experiencing and engaging in humor, shame, love, and punishment. Babies, then, are the opposite of what it means to be a completed person because they are soft, little, and entirely dependent on others to take care of them. Not only that, but they also are viewed as totally dominated by corporeal desires, whereas adults and complete persons are able to control those desires. He

[4] Uzendoski here seems to not be in agreement with political ontology and decolonial theorists whose work emphasizes the dominance of EuroAmerican culture at the expense and erasure of all seemingly subordinate ones.

describes the birthing process and the rituals associated with it. This chapter also deals with related concepts like the will and the relationship between the body and the soul. He writes that the body/soul distinction is not an ontological discontinuity, as it is in most Western philosophy, but rather a relationship between external form and internal substance. In other words, divinity and humanity do not occupy separate ontological domains. He also discusses gender as it relates to personhood and how gender, both within normal social structures and outside of them, is treated in Runa society.

The second chapter covers the poetics of social form and the concept of *unai*. *Unai* is a means of perceiving the world, especially the rainforest. It is not a mere concept, but is a somatic, millennial, pragmatic, and aesthetic quality of the human condition. He develops this definition with examples throughout the chapter. One of the ways *unai* is manifest is in the power of shape-shifting, or taking on the energy of another life force. This is inextricably tied up with shamanism and, more recently, with Evangelical Protestantism. Uzendoski writes that the forces of *samai* ('substance'), and affective life are configured by an aesthetics of shape-shifting and transformation.

The third chapter discusses marriage and making kin through marriage. Here he explains more about his personal experiences getting married to his Kichwa wife and the kinship struggles that came from it. Of course, a discussion of marriage would be incomplete without mention of liminality. The author describes various aspects of the marriage rituals and ceremonies that constitute liminal stages, moving the participants from one phase of life to another. He also

outlines the elements of a Runa wedding. Concomitant to the discussion of marriage, the fourth chapter deals with the transformation of affinity into consanguinity. Herein he discusses various forms of affinal relationships: *masha*/*cachun* incorporation, *compadrazgo*, alliance, and adoption. He writes that these kinship forms all exhibit a common theme: the transformation of affinity into consanguinity, and they are modeled on the idea of consanguineal relations and the sharing of substance, particularly food and *aswa*, or manioc beer. He goes on to further explain how that transformation of affinity occurs. He ends the chapter discussing the values of giving and reciprocity in Napo Runa culture.

Chapter five is based on an article under a similar name. This chapter revolves around the important symbols of meat, manioc brew (*aswa*), and desire. He addresses the relation between the two practices of food production and life production. He also examines how desire, gender complementarity, and cosmology are structured from the perspective of circulation and the general process of value production. Included in these descriptions are *minga*s, or work parties. Labor and pleasure (eating and drinking) are vital and complementary parts to a complete and healthy Runa life. The production of meat and manioc (i.e. cassava) also point to deeply important gender roles, those of an *aicha yaya* (meat father) and a *chagra mama* (garden mother).

The final chapter covers an indigenous uprising, somewhat like the *caminata* Whitten, Jr. covers in an article below. Uzendoski discusses how ritual and kinship forms structure views of past and future epochs and events. This would begin to sound like a movement toward political anthropology as opposed

to structuralist emphases, but Uzendoski turns his focus in this chapter from the ethnographic present to the millennial nature of the Runa system of value. Therefore, even when discussing political events, this largely structuralist theorist points to the ways in which cosmology is at play in indigenous uprisings. Specifically, he discusses Jumandy, an indigenous insurgent, of whom there is a statue in Tena, the capital of Napo province. Uzendoski also gives a historical background to indigenous marches and demonstrations, and he ties in the various concepts discussed in previous chapters and applies them to the uprising described here.

Norm Whitten, Jr.'s works continue in the tradition of underlining cosmological forces in larger social practices or events, but with a bit of transition toward more political anthropology-focused texts. The first article of his that we look at here is titled "Ecological Imagery and Cultural Adaptability: The Canelos Quichua of Eastern Ecuador" (1978). In this essay, Whitten, Jr. states that ecological imagery provides a paradigmatic, symbolic template organized by sets of cosmological premises. This template, held down by traditional shamanism and ceramic manufacture, is invoked in emotionally charged ceremonial and juropolitical contexts to express resistance to nonnative peoples (i.e. the Catholic church) who have a potential or real impact on the ecosystem and indigenous political economy. The purpose of this paper is to present evidence of structural coherence and adaptability manifest in the Canelos Kichwa of east-central Ecuador, who at the time were seen as undergoing rapid, possibly cataclysmic change. Whitten, Jr. argues that symbolic processing of ecological imagery

among the Canelos Kichwa promotes effective communication about ecosystem dynamics and generates a myriad of metaphoric predictions allowing for both cultural continuity and change within an environment of ecosystem transformation.[5] The paradigm of ecological imagery that Whitten, Jr. evokes is what the Canelos Runa draw on to express rejection of the Catholic church and to protest national bureaucratic control of the ecosystem, which is inherently tied up with the Canelos Kichwa's cosmology based on concepts of animism. Although a bit dense, this article serves to explain certain Kichwa cosmological topics, how they mesh with nature, and how these are applied in a political resistance setting. Whitten, Jr. focuses both on Kichwa ways of seeing nature, which is very common for structuralist/ontological writers to emphasize, and on ethnography drawn from Kichwa scenes of resistance, drawing in issues of hegemony, power, and political economy—topics largely ignored by previous authors in this section.

Another article, "Interculturality and the Indigenization of Modernity: A View from Amazonian Ecuador" (2008), by Whitten, Jr. follows in these same footsteps. In this article, Whitten, Jr. gives a long history and topography of the Canelos area where the Canelos Kichwa reside. His central theme, however, is the concept of 'the indigenization of modernity', although he spends the majority of the paper explaining history and origin stories to give context. Regardless, his cultural insights once again prove invaluable as they are more detailed than most others. He explains that the relationships cultivated within language, history, and

[5] The topics of cultural continuity and change are reflected in other structuralists more well known in the anthropological discipline, namely Joel Robbins (2007) and Marshall Sahlins (1981; 1985; etc.), among others.

ecology between the lowlands and the highlands address the subject of ethnogenesis in indigenous thought and in written historical portrayal. The indigenization of modernity has clear millennial proclivities, and the intertwining of millennial[6] and modern processes is present in a myriad of intercultural systems wherein people seek to obtain modern amenities through counterhegemonic transformative systems of indigenous meaning. Whitten, Jr.'s interests obviously lie with millennialism as a religious system with moral and epistemological implications, but he uses the backdrop of modernity and counterhegemonic ways of being as his sites of interest, once more marking his work as one that neatly bridges the gap between structuralist literature and political literature, showing that these categories, while helpful for delineating trends within anthropology and Kichwa studies, also have very blurry edges and overlap with each other in various ways.

A final work by Whitten, Jr., his wife Dorothea, and one of their interlocutors Alfonso Chango, is called "Return of the Yumbo: The Indigenous *Caminata* from Amazonia to Andean Quito" (1997). Another historical-political account, this article is an ethnography of the *Caminata de Pastaza a Quito* ('March from Pastaza to Quito') that occurred in 1992. Whitten, Jr., Whitten, and Chango classify this event as just one example of many similar counterhegemonic events that took place during that decade. Such a demonstration, however, necessarily calls for a description of the Ecuadorian nation-state and an analysis of the nationalist overtones of events like the *caminata* led by

[6] In other theoretical traditions, this may be referred to instead as 'futures' or 'futurity', though perhaps with less religious overtones.

marginalized groups, and indeed Whitten, Jr., Whitten, and Chango describe these Ecuador-specific nuances and their sociopolitical background. According to the authors, the four proposals or *planteamientos* that formed the basis of the *caminata* were: 1) establishment of permanent territorial rights for indigenous people; 2) derivation of rights to wealth from territorial commerce, including subsurface exploitation; 3) final resolution of 117 specific conflicts registered by indigenous people over land rights; and 4) a national constitutional reform to make Ecuador a multicultural, multinational nation-state. The author's main goal in this paper is to describe the symbolic dimensions of the march (such as native headdresses) and what they meant from an anthropological point of view, which is what marks it as distinct from political anthropological literature. Chango and the Whittens use political events as a way to analyze semiosis and indigenous worldviews, rather than as a way to look at the politics and organizations themselves. Of course, the historical and political descriptions they provide are highly useful and important for understanding Kichwa political involvement in the twentieth century, but their goal is not necessarily to dissect power relations between indigenous groups and the Ecuadorian state, although it does describe a more recent political struggle between the marginalized, poor, powerless, Kichwa-speaking indigenous and the wealthy, powerful, Spanish-speaking elite and populous.

Summary of the First Trend

The structuralist and somewhat ontological literature highlighted in this section give us a sense of what Kichwa culture is like, what it might be like to be Kichwa and to see the forest as a Kichwa person does, or what it might be like to approach marriage as a

Kichwa person, for instance. The political anthropology literature that follows does not give us quite the same experience. Rather, it focuses on a very specific part of the Runa experience—that of political organization and leadership—as opposed to the broad overview of Runa culture and society that structural anthropology provides. As was pointed out, however, not all of these authors have approached the study of Kichwa culture and cosmology in the same way. Some come at it from a linguistic or literary point of view, others are more decidedly ontological, while others teeter on the edge between the political and the cultural.

However, as was discussed in the introduction to this paper, major critiques have been leveraged against this type of anthropological analysis. Most significantly, this 'traditional' approach most obviously lacks mention of contestation and power, ignoring to some extent the ways in which indigenous peoples have been subjected to negative treatment and exploitation by colonizing forces. Additionally, a byproduct of neglecting this history and lived experience is that it instills a static or othering view of indigenous peoples, not seeing them as modern or political and encouraging a nativistic view. This is problematic because it does not reflect the reality that indigenous peoples live and work in the modern world—owning televisions, using cell phones, and taking buses to school, for example. Instead, this nativistic view encourages those in the West to see only essentialized, fetishized, reduced versions of native peoples, stuck in the past and unable or unwilling to adjust to modernity. Of course, some of the authors—Norm Whitten, Jr. in particular and Uzendoski to a smaller extent—diverge from this common pitfall and include the political and modern in their analyses of Kichwa people. However, in an attempt to counter these shortcomings, new approaches to anthropological inquiry arose

in the 1980s and 90s utilizing the theories of Gramsci, Foucault, and Marx as a way to emphasize power differentials and dynamics, class and racial inequality, and political leadership and organization. The next section provides us with an overview of some of this literature as applied to the Kichwa context, marking a fairly clean break from the theories of the structuralist literature we have discussed here.

SECOND TREND: THE 'NEW' LITERATURE OF THE POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS

This section contains an outline of a few exemplary texts in political anthropology as applied to the Runa context. As mentioned before, these texts emphasize issues of politics, power, and governmentality, largely drawing from the theoretical traditions of Foucault, Gramsci, and Marx and largely borne out of a reaction against the shortcomings and oversights of structuralist-type inquiries. Much of the literature these works draw from are also more recent than those emphasized in the previous section, lending to the idea and ethos that political anthropology is newer and more progressive than structural anthropology, even though much of the literature from both theoretical trends has been published concurrently. And as mentioned before, structuralist approaches tended to essentialize indigenous peoples as static, 'traditional', and non-political, in some ways encouraging their subjugation and maltreatment by hegemonic powers, further lending to the idea of political anthropology as making a progressive move forward and viewing indigenous peoples as just as politically savvy and involved as Westerners, but with obvious social disadvantages. This approach, then, leans toward lessening the idea of difference between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Furthermore, because of the unique historical and ecological context of the Amazon, these books also speak to the issues that anthropology has come to engage with quite often in Latin American literature: colonialism, neoliberalism, and extraction. Of course indigeneity is an important theme in this literature as well, since the authors draw from ethnographic data obtained from Kichwa peoples in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

Indigenous Leadership and Sovereignty with Juliet Erazo

We begin this section with Juliet Erazo's book *Governing Indigenous Territories: Enacting Sovereignty in the Ecuadorian Amazon* (2013). This book delves into indigenous politics and 'territorial citizenship' in Rukullakta, Ecuador. Rukullakta is an indigenous territory that is both place and property and governed by Kichwa peoples. Erazo looks at the dialectical process of Rukullakta's Kichwa leaders shaping the residents into citizens and the citizens thereby shaping leaders. The book starts with a historical background covering the Spanish appearing in the region in the sixteenth century; the ensuing colonization, uprisings, and abandonment of the area by the colonial powers; and the arrival of the missionaries, whose attempt to incorporate the Napo Kichwa into both the Christian faith and the national economy was met with some success.

Erazo then explores the relationships between leaders and citizens as they are negotiated around the intertwined issues of Rukullakta economy, property regimes, and land use. Tracing the history of the Rukullakta cooperative, she illuminates the uneasy role of the collective at its inception in a cultural context where political hierarchies were unwelcome. Erazo looks back to the early days of the collective and the projects implemented through collective labor. Using historical details, such as local people contributing their labor toward the collective's projects in order to impress state officials (67), Erazo shows how hierarchies in the Kichwa collective were necessary in dealing with other extant hierarchies.

The second chapter explains how state funding, when it flowed to the project as it did in the 1970s, gave the leaders legitimacy and enabled them to deliver 'development'

in the form of community centers, cattle, cooperative members, etc. When the funding dried up, however, the collectivist ethos subsided, settling somewhere between the large-scale collaboration envisioned by the project leaders and the pre-1970s patrilineal kin groups.

In chapter three Erazo highlights another important element of Rukullakta history: 'the land problem' and the debates about property, which are also debates about the rights of citizens and the role of the government. She also points out that in Rukullakta there were three distinct and competing understandings of citizen-government relationships. These included 1) a collectivist view that envisioned citizenship as commitment to territorial government that would manage the lands to benefit all; 2) a conservative view that saw collective projects not as a temporary solution but as instrumental for receiving a collective land title, after which point pre-cooperative land claims would be reinstated; and 3) the egalitarian view, which advocated an equal division of land among all citizens to be used as each person wished. Erazo is careful to point out that all three modalities "combine aspects of older ways of doing things with some of the notions that the state [and the missionaries] promoted" (100-101). Her treatment of these competing visions of citizen-government relationships is important in an academic environment in which Amazonian groups are often homogenized in the various political idealizations that get projected onto them. In that, she also makes an important contribution to ethnographic knowledge that counters imaginaries of Amazonian indigenous groups as either static, stuck in an 'ethnographic present', or as falling squarely on one side of the 'traditional-modern' binary.

Her discussion of debates and conflicts over land rights and land use continues into the 1990s, and covers the impact of conservation initiatives that were largely unaware of the local debates over property that were occurring. These initiatives came to Rukullakta with an anti-cash crop and anti-cattle ranching agenda, implementing 'community-based development projects' which encouraged the collectivists' preference for central management. Bringing us into the era of conservation and ecotourism, which is booming in the Napo Province, Erazo shows that the political framework of Rukullakta's existence was always negotiated and remains contested to this day, utilizing Foucault's concept of discourse beautifully.

Chapter four goes on to analyze the impact of conservation and sustainable development projects in the region, with an overview of how ecotourism has become a desirable form of development for the cooperative and how conservation initiatives have become a medium for new contracts and understandings between Rukullakta and the state of Ecuador. Erazo also states that "after three decades of interactions with environmentalists…leaders in Rukullakta—and in the Ecuadorian Amazon more broadly—have come to see nature as limited and in need of protection by and from human beings" (168). Whether this generalization is completely truthful or not, Erazo provides a well-documented and detailed view of the role conservation has played in the region and how it maps on to older struggles over land and land futures.

The fifth chapter observes how Rukullakta's residents negotiate and perform unity, as well as how they manage conflict. Along with this, Erazo examines strategies through which citizens shape their leaders: strategic unity against outside threats, the role of leaders in resolving disputes over sorcery in the community, and community youth

contests, to name a few. This chapter profiles spaces and circumstances that show the range of what 'territorial governance' includes and how it is being broadened and expanded among Rukullacta members and residents.

Finally, the conclusion sums up the changes that have happened to and within Rukullakta and highlights the fact that in this space, Kichwa leaders have been constantly innovative, forging new 'governable spaces' and leveraging new technologies of citizenship. Conversely, Erazo reminds the reader that just as Rukullakta leaders shape citizens, the citizens, in turn, shape their leaders, bringing their own agencies into the equation. For Erazo, the subjects created in these discourses of development and collectives are not without agency. And for her, the history of Rukullacta continues to unfold as its citizens deal with ecotourism initiatives, petroleum roads, and new state interests, contributing to their non-static nature.

In contrast to the literature discussed in the previous section on structuralist Kichwa literature, Erazo's book helps us to see indigenous Runa as politically savvy, leveraging what they have as indigenous peoples in the Amazon to gain political advantage and to create their own forms of government. And although not previously mentioned, Erazo's political economy approach makes apparent the importance of territory to indigenous peoples, especially in light of hegemonic forces vying for their land. Structuralist literature mentions land largely in terms of gardening, nature, or the forest—not necessarily the ways in which claiming ownership or right to land are politicized and messy when various forces (such as the state, transnational corporations, and various racial or ethnic groups) are at play.

And although Erazo's work pushes its readers to see indigenous peoples as political, she is careful to not necessarily push for a homogenized view of Indians. She writes that:

> when most people hear the terms 'indigenous territory' or 'indigenous sovereignty,' they imagine that, compared to non-indigenous groups, indigenous peoples who live in their own territories are more culturally homogenous, with shared values and priorities, making political unity straightforward or even natural. [However,] the enactment of sovereignty has always been, and continues to be, a political process, full of the negotiations and controversies over expectations and obligations that characterize most (if not all) political processes. (xix)

Erazo and other writers in the political economy tradition tend to subsume nearly all practices under the political, but here she is aware that she does not want to paint indigenous people with a broad brushstroke. It is complicated and messy, she admits, making nearly all political processes complex and therefore potentially interesting. In essence, this is Erazo's argument: that the enactment of sovereignty is a process. It is messy, with many contending views of what indigenous sovereignty should look like and with various motives behind those views.

Oil and Neoliberalism with Suzana Sawyer

As another work highlighting the ways in which political anthropological literature is applied to Amazonian studies, we move on to Suzana Sawyer's *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador* (2004). Sawyer's book emphasizes not people or place as might be popular in other ethnographies, but civil protest. Her book concentrates on a five-year period from 1992 to 1997 and the "conflicts among indigenous peoples, a multinational corporation, and a

neoliberalizing third-world state over the exploration and exploitation of petroleum in Ecuador" (17). For her research in this ethnography, Sawyer collaborated closely with OPIP (*Organización de los Pueblos Indígenas de Pastaza*, 'Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza'), a political organization representing Amazonian indigenous people threatened by the Ecuadorian government's auctioning of oil rights in their territory. Although all members of Amazonian indigenous groups can align themselves with OPIP, the largest group in the Ecuadorian Amazon and in OPIP are Kichwa-speaking peoples. Her project, however, encompasses the national indigenous movement and the widespread fight to defend all indigenous landholdings.

She begins with an opening section that introduces OPIP, the transnational corporation ARCO, and the goals of her research. She aims to look at indigenous resistance to oil exploration in Ecuador's Pastaza province as "opposition to globalization in its neoliberal guise" (7). Specifically, she provides an account of how OPIP fought the plans of ARCO to exploit their concession in Pastaza. This opposition coincided with several historical junctures, including the rise of the Ecuadorian indigenous rights movement (mentioned above in the historical section) and the government's adoption of neoliberal economic policies, which privatized utilities, cut subsidies that benefitted the poor, deregulated industries, and emphasized free market capitalism. The first chapter then describes the 250 kilometer protest march from the Amazonian region to Quito organized by lowland peoples in 1992.[7] This was in light of centuries of overlooking indigenous peoples in Ecuador, either considering them sub-citizens or ignoring their existence entirely. The early 1990s and 2000s, then, served to challenge the "hierarchical

[7] The *caminata* earlier described by Whitten, Jr., Whitten, and Chango (1997).

and exclusionary notion of the nation" (29). The following three chapters then detail indigenous leaders' and the oil company's fights over development funds and environmental protection, conflicts that ensnared local communities, national indigenous organizations, state agencies, and international environmental groups.

By recording political meetings, Sawyer captures the analytical acuity of indigenous leaders. Individuals such as Leonardo Viteri and Hector Villamil are seen negotiating in the Andean capital with the government for their land, suffering insults as they try to convince Kichwa communities about the flimsiness of ARCO's promises, and confronting multinational corporations in conference rooms of luxury hotels. Sawyer is careful to show the ideological divides in all these encounters. Oil company executives insist on transparency, democracy, and the freedom of individuals to make their own choices. Indigenous leaders, in contrast, fight for solidarity. Citing a history of betrayal that has accompanied promises of democracy and progress, she quotes an indigenous leader stating: "We are defending our historic rights—our rights to life. United, organized, we want to guarantee a better life with dignity for our children, for future generations" (133). Sawyer continues her eyewitness account of indigenous politics with her story of 1994's 'Mobilization for Life'. These protests were launched by CONAIE (the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*, 'Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador') against the new land rights legislation. Her narrative details the story of the political clash that followed the law's passage. Headed by highland natives, the national movement blocked roads and shut down commerce throughout much of the country. Sawyer was one of two foreigners present at the subsequent negotiations, and she recorded the Indian leaders' lengthy dialogue with

Ecuadorian President Durán Ballén. Her discussion goes beyond ideology and includes the various racist assumptions that placed the protagonists in different realities, including how state narratives created the Indian subject.

Sawyer in particular focuses on critiquing the notion of neoliberalism and globalization being universal or inevitable forces. Although they are extremely powerful and hegemonic in Sawyer's opinion, they are also always contested, in ways perhaps unseen to those from the global center. This is of course a very Foucauldian view, emphasizing the contestation that is always involved in discourses (including those as powerful as neoliberalism and globalization). This point also has a decidedly decolonial feel to it, as well, as it points to the idea that Western logics are culturally specific and historically bounded. In this book, Sawyer therefore stresses the ways in which neoliberal reform has been pushed back and even sometimes failed in Ecuador, in large part due to the role of indigenous social movements. These movements, as the author explains, often employ methods very similar to those employed by the vanguards of neoliberal reform, such as transnational corporations, but in ways that subvert those corporations' intentions and instead push forward the indigenous agenda. This perspective is extremely important because it challenges the stereotype that indigenous people's motives and intentions are intrinsically pure, a remnant of the 'noble savage' myth.

In this book, Sawyer is occupied with demonstrating the ways in which neoliberalism is enacted in Ecuador through the state government and transnational corporations. Neoliberal economic reform's extremely negative effects on indigenous peoples in this country, however, jeopardized the credibility of the state and provoked a crisis of representation and accountability in Ecuador, which:

> spurred the conditions of possibility for a disruptive indigenous movement that denounced the government's allegiances to transnational capital and its unresponsiveness to subaltern subjects. That is, a global model of economic reforms that sought to modernize and normalize citizens in Ecuador unintentionally produced transgressive political subjects—people who resist, challenge, and subvert the state's agenda to privatize, liberalize, and deregulate the nation's economy to a degree rarely seen before. (343-347)

In other words, neoliberalism produced its own subjects of contestation. Throughout the book, Sawyer explains how indigenous organizations such as OPIP enact these contestations, what their strategies entail, and how they serve to disrupt the state-backed neoliberal reforms aimed at modernization and liberalization. This serves as evidence of the failure of globalization and neoliberalism to fully homogenize the populace and in fact highlights the ways in which those modernizing and homogenizing effects fail at the world margins because they so intrinsically leave out large swaths of the population.

Much of the literature focused on the Amazon and indigenous struggles in Latin America emphasize the importance of land and territory to Kichwa and other indigenous peoples. This, of course, is important because indigeneity is necessarily tied up with issues of land because of the temporal claim indigenous peoples have due to their being first on the land. This flies in the face of privatization measures proposed by neoliberal capitalism, which is why, in part, territory and land claims are such major speaking points in indigenous movements and struggles against the state and transnational corporations. However, Sawyer takes this common narrative of indigenous people's claim to land a step further, asserting that "Social conflict over physical things like land and petroleum was about more than the materiality of their use. Struggles over the control of land and oil operations in Ecuador were as much about configuring the nation under

neoliberalism— rupturing the silences around social injustice, provoking a space of accountability, reimagining narratives of national belonging—as they were about the material use and extraction of rain forest resources" (353-356). This lends to Sawyer's overall purpose to challenge depictions of globalization as homogenizing and of transnational capitalism as all-powerful. Instead, globalization encourages political, economic, and social inequalities and transnational capitalism is quite fragile at the third-world margins, allowing for subaltern oppositional movements to proliferate precisely through the same transnational processes that enable hyperexploitation under globalization (363-364).

Just as Erazo focuses on the subjects created and contested in the challenge to enact indigenous sovereignty, Sawyer also documents the ways in which new forms of neoliberal governing attempt to produce docile bodies and new subjects. Furthermore, state and multinational encroachment into the lands and lives of indigenous people also elicits alternative and transgressive subjectivities. She writes that "a global model of economic reforms that sought to modernize and normalize citizens in Ecuador unintentionally produced transgressive political subjects—people who resist, challenge, and subvert the state's agenda to privatize, liberalize, and deregulate the nation's economy to a degree rarely seen before" (345-347). Although the creation of these subjects is logical in a Foucauldian sense and appears accurate, the idea that neoliberalism alone produced such transgressive actors is, I believe, misleading. Much literature on indigeneity in Latin America tends to place the inception of indigenous uprisings and movements in the late twentieth century, alongside the rise of democracy, liberalism, and capitalism. Such rebellions and organizing practices, however, had been

occurring in Ecuador since colonial times. Writer Ileana Almeida (2008), for instance, gives us a historical trajectory to keep in mind: in the sixteenth century there was a militarized, indigenous social response against invading Spanish troops. Over centuries of colonial imposition, acceptance of the colonial presence was not unanimous nor entirely pacific, and hispanization combined with syncretism and resistance. "In the eighteenth century," Almeida explains, "messianic rebellions increased dramatically as a form of protest against the excessive tributary taxes and authoritative abuse. There were also increasing requirements for cultivable land that communities used to subsist. In sum, in the republican era there were constant revolts" (10). Besides land, citizenship was (and continues to be) an important factor for indigenous and, more broadly, subaltern mobilization. As Michiel Baud writes, "The struggle for indigenous citizenship was…accompanied by unprecedented conflicts and violence on a local and regional scale" (2007, 24). This violence would eventually lead to indigenous uprisings and rebellions at the very end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, spreading out until the modern day and becoming part of the fight for sovereignty and autonomy. Regardless, the unique time period of the twentieth century with an increased presence of capitalist and democratic values made excellent fodder for indigenous movements, even if it was not the only time that rebellions and indigenous transgressive subjects were created. This is especially poignant in light of the fact that Indians had typically and historically been ignored or overlooked in the Ecuadorian nation-state, so democracy (and as Sawyer writes, neoliberalism) now made it possible—and in fact ideal—for their voices to be heard.

Summary of the Second Trend

Sawyer's book about neoliberalism, power, and governmentality is a striking example of political anthropology as applied to indigenous peoples in Ecuador. It is also noted how this type of literature grew out of the structuralist tradition, attempting to rectify its glossing over political issues and power differentials. However, is it possible that the political economy literature stresses the political and power *too* much? It seems that stressing political organization and economy can create a fetishization of suffering and lend to overlooking indigenous culture itself, as well as encourage a view of indigenous peoples that is less optimistic for their more equal treatment in the future.[8] Though perhaps structuralism ignored power for the benefit of culture—which, although it can be essentializing and fetishizing, can also allow and has allowed indigenous people to claim legitimacy for their cultural practices and encourages their uniqueness in the face of globalizing Western forces. Many writers,[9] in fact, have documented in late twentieth-century Latin American social movements and politics the shift away from resource mobilization and class-based struggles toward identity and culture as leverage for indigenous demands on the state. In Ecuador, this led to discussions of plurinationality, and discourse about nationalities began to be discussed in terms of ethnicity. In her book *The Elusive Promise of Indigenous Development: Rights, Culture, Strategy* (2010), Karen Engle demonstrates how this development concerning culture in Latin American indigenous social movements was a result of debates over rights in the United Nations

[8] See Trouillot's (2003) concept of the 'savage slot' and others' use of it as the 'suffering slot' (see Robbins 2013; Ortner 2016; and Appadurai 2016).
[9] See, for instance, Offe (1985), Melucci (1988), Plotke (1990), Slater (1985), Escobar and Alvarez (1992), Postero and Zamosc (2004), and de la Cadena (2010).

and other international institutions. Because nation-states would not cede their sovereignty to groups demanding it, indigenous peoples sought new strategies to improve their internal and extern conditions, turning to culture as a site of organizing and developing a 'human right to culture'. According to Engle, these culture arguments have dominated the past two decades of international indigenous advocacy and have been met with varying degrees of success in the age of multiculturalism. And more, Engle writes, the romanticized notions of 'pure' indigeneity produced through such emphases on culture offer a radical alternative and challenge to predominant Western societal and cultural features, such as capitalism, neoliberalism, and individualism.[10]

Political anthropology, on the other hand, in some ways refuses great ethnographic detail, potentially subsuming indigenous culture into non-indigenous culture in an attempt to emphasize the political. Although power differentials are real and should not be overlooked, emphasizing them can also give them more power, just as ignoring them can erase them entirely. This struggle and balance obviously has no easy answer, but pointing it out serves to show how each brand of literature has its pros and cons, its negative and positive consequences based on its approach, its theory, and its perspective. It also highlights a main current running through these various traditions and approaches to ethnographic research involving indigenous peoples: how similar or not are they to us, the Westerners? Structuralists and ontologists tended to emphasize their difference and radical alterity, although showing that their social organizations and systems can be compared to ours despite differences. Political anthropology, in a reaction

[10] In this way, then, structural anthropology's downsides may actually be productive in pushing against Western logics.

to the previous trend, tended to emphasize their similarity to Westerners, employing political skill and leadership strategies as capably as anyone else. Besides being a very intentional omission since an emphasis on difference whiffs strongly of imperialism, in general political anthropologists merely did not *see* ontological differences because that was not their focus. However, which approach is correct? Are both correct to some extent, perhaps in a scalar sort of way? How, if possible, can these two opposing trends be reconciled?[11]

Although there is not an example of a reconciliation of these two theoretical traditions within Kichwa studies, I believe the political ontology approach can be recognized as a first attempt to bridge the gap between them. The model that these very recent works use can be applied to the Runa context, of course, but it can also be and is being used in the larger anthropological sphere to speak to both camps—the structuralists and the political economists—hopefully without losing much of the advantages from either. In the next section I introduce new literature that will help to bring the structuralist/ontological into dialogue with the political anthropological, and I attempt to add my voice to the debate about how we as Western researchers should approach difference.

[11] Or perhaps, as Joseph Hankins (2015) argues, this is less an issue of similarity versus difference and more about connection and different ways of empathizing with the 'other'. This is a much more ontologically-inspired argument.

THIRD TREND: BRIDGING THE GAP WITH POLITICAL ONTOLOGY

As I explained in the introduction to this paper, ontology within anthropology refers to the idea that multiple perspectives or worldviews exist simultaneously and overlap in interesting and complex ways. Humans can reside within one or more ontologies depending on our intersectional experiences, history, politics, and economies. In the last decade or so, ontology has taken ahold of the anthropological community's imagination, leading to what has been dubbed the 'ontological turn'. Perhaps nothing more than a passing fad—although a very powerful one at the moment—ontological concerns re-center anthropological inquiry on difference. After structuralist approaches seemed to reify alterity in such a way that those who were 'othered' were exoticized, essentialized, and fetishized, movements like political anthropology attempted to move away from culture and difference so as not to make the same mistakes. Now, as some argue, ontology is merely another way of referring to culture and that it reacquaints us with difference. Regardless, political ontology is a new way of approaching alterity while also recognizing that the 'othered' can be and are necessarily political, although perhaps in unexpected ways. This section introduces us to two works that attempt to tackle the political and the ontological/structural, bringing together two disparate modes of anthropological inquiry.

Earth-beings and Cosmopolitics with Marisol de la Cadena

We begin with the increasingly famous book by Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds* (2015). de la Cadena's work has made interesting waves within the anthropological and Latin Americanist communities.

Earth Beings is the result of de la Cadena's decade-long conversations with Mariano and Nazario Turpo, father and son, *runakuna* or Quechua people in Peru. Concerned with the mutual entanglements of indigenous and non-indigenous worlds, and the partial connections between them, de la Cadena presents how the Turpos' indigenous ways of knowing and being include and exceed modern and nonmodern practices. Her discussion of indigenous political strategies—a realm that need not abide by binary logics—reconfigures how to think about and question modern politics, while pushing us to think beyond 'hybridity' and toward translation, communication that accepts incommensurability, and mutual difference.

de la Cadena argues that truly understanding indigenous-environmental relations requires abandoning closely held modern notions and acknowledging a different kind of world altogether. In essence this requires a fundamental rethinking of reality in order to understand indigenous peoples. This is a direct rejection of the recent desire to disavow 'culture' and the ways in which it emphasizes difference. Indeed, the author argues that we must acknowledge the fundamental alterity of the indigenous world. In this work, de la Cadena emphasizes just two worlds, that of the *ayllu* or community of *runakuna* engaged with earth-beings and the world of the modern Peruvian state that privileges landlords' economic power and the non-indigenous, modern experience of reality. Although separate, the Peruvian and indigenous worlds "are circuited together" in 'symbiotic' connection, interchanging practices and ideas "without consuming the difference" between them (4). As the author explains, her informants are accustomed to living within this duality, from syncretic religion to political ceremonies marked by indigenous folkloric performance. This is achieved through interconnected realities,

which de la Cadena explains with the theories of Donna Haraway (1991), Marilyn Strathern (1991), and Annemarie Mol (2002). This also involves not subsuming indigenous experience under 'belief', which is perhaps something that is proliferated by structuralism's approach to difference. Instead, de la Cadena pursues the "ethnographic impulse to take at face value…events that were impossible according to history…without bifurcating our conversation into their belief and my knowledge" (14). She argues that the modern bifurcated telling does indigenous people harm in two ways. First, it fails to apprehend them as they are and, therefore, it posits an understanding of their existence that is wrongly circumscribed. Imagining this in an ethnographic setting, either the ethnographer takes the indigenous people seriously as knowers of their own lives, or she does not. In this way, as Julie Archambault (2016) has written:

> Marisol de la Cadena (2010, 364) proposes to take peoples' relationships with the mountain Ausangate seriously, by which she specifies that she means "literally, rather than metaphorically". The ontological turn thus calls for an exploration into the literal rather than the metaphorical, for a suspension of skepticism. It proposes a radical rethinking of alterity by encouraging us to consider the possibility of other worlds and therefore to move beyond the more classic recognition of other worldviews. (2016, 244)

The second harm is a subtler failure to see the entities with whom *runakuna* live in relationship. Her critique then informs a perceptive and enlightening re-reading of Andean ethnography, avoiding the pitfall of assuming indigenous people and their worlds are not to be taken seriously.

Throughout the book, de la Cadena introduces cases in which outsiders fail to translate *runakuna* practices, and then she offers subtle corrections that become occasions to deepen our understanding. This is 'the method of controlled equivocation' proposed by

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in his article "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies" (2004). In this he describes his concepts of Amerindian perspectivism and multinaturalism while comparing Amerindian ontologies with and criticizing Western dualist, naturalist ontologies. This ontological understanding of there being multiple perspectives inhabiting the world is echoed in de la Cadena's work, in which she explains that ontology implies that there are multiple co-existing worlds that are more than mere imaginary representations. They are different perspectival positions or views from different worlds, rather than multiple perspectives on the same world. The misinterpretation that occurs between these worlds is what is referred to as 'equivocation' in Viveiros de Castro's terms. But de la Cadena makes sure to point out that these misinterpretations and lack of understanding are not due to 'cultural differences', as the multicultural argument would have it. Instead, it is a controversy nested within more than one and less than many socionatural worlds. de la Cadena's use of Viveiros de Castro's equivocations treats mistranslations between disparate ontologies and across unequal power relations as diagnostic moments for insight on such differences.

de la Cadena applies these lessons to the Andean political realm with her well-known discussion of the mountain Ausangate. To begin, de la Cadena introduces Rancière's term 'earth-beings' (*tirakuna*) to describe other-than-human presences, particularly those conjured by indigenous politicians into the political sphere. One of these earth-beings is Ausangate, a mountain in Peru that indigenous peoples framed as having intentionality and subjectivity, and which is therefore capable of violent reactions if a mine were to be built at the Coyllur Rit'I sanctuary on its peak. de la Cadena explains

elsewhere that this type of subjective framing in political terms is evidence that indigenous movements and politics are more than just organized politics articulating ethnic emergence, and that, in fact, earth-beings' "presence in politics disavows the separation between 'Nature' and 'Humanity,' on which the political theory our world abides by was historically founded" (2010, 342). She explains that, historically, indigenous peoples in the Andes (and elsewhere in the Americas and around the world, for that matter), were considered closer to 'nature' than Western colonizers, who represented 'culture' or 'humanity'. In this dichotomous relationship, indigenous peoples were therefore thought of as the opposite of culture and humanity and so occupied a space with nonhumans. Because of this othering relation, Indians were denied their difference and were therefore not allowed an adversarial relationship with whites, which relationship de la Cadena argues is the basis of political engagement.

Following this logic, the only way indigenous peoples could engage in politics was to go through a process of transformation (through literacy and urbanization), to become human and move away from the 'natural'. She writes: "together these two antitheses—between humanity and nature, and between allegedly superior and inferior humans—declared the gradual extinction of other-than-human beings and the worlds in which they existed" (2010, 345). This historical trajectory—based on Western ideas of there being a distinction between nature and culture—caused later earth-beings like Ausangate to be left out of politics and all other social relationships determined by the hegemonic European ontology. These earth-beings are left out of politics because, as de la Cadena writes, "runakuna engage in political practices that the state recognizes as legitimate while also enacting those that the state cannot recognize—and not only

because it does not want to, but also because engaging with what is excessive to it would require its transformation, even its undoing as a modern state" (648-650). In other words, for the state to engage in politics that incorporate earth-beings, it would have to delegitimize or de-hegemonize itself, thereby ceasing to be a state altogether. The author also mentions that "the public presence of earth-beings in politics is ontologically unconstitutional in states ordered by biopolitical practices that conceive human life as discontinuous from (what those same practices call) nature" (1961-1962). Therefore, this dichotomy between nature and culture is one of the foundations of ontological equivocation between *runakuna* and the Peruvian state.

For de la Cadena, these disparate worlds cannot fully be understood one by another. Equivocations abound and only approximations post-translation can be made. This translation is made possible through partial connections, a concept coined by Strathern (2004). In fact, the author writes, "this book is composed in translation and through partial connections. It is through partially connected translations—and also partially translated connections—that I reflect on the complexities across worlds that formed Mariano's and Nazario's lives" (2015, 498-500). But for the author, this is not merely a theoretical tool or concept, it is also political. In this case, being political means that these indigenous peoples can fight the mining project determined to deface Ausangate. This fight, de la Cadena argues, is actualized through partial connections. "It allows assertions of indigenous and non-indigenous conditions outside of state taxonomies that," she writes, "based on the evolutionary and/or multicultural practice of plurality (that is, the idea that the alternative to one is many), demand the purity of a unit or deny existence" (1007-1009). And as Fabricant and Postero (in press) point out, the

space of partial connections, that in-betweenness, "is not just a space of representation or radical difference; it is also a site of political action and savvy forms of negotiation" (18).

Storytelling Globalization with Mario Blaser

Following de la Cadena, the ontological and the political can be unified in complex ways that challenge our notions of reality, relativism, and pluralism. And it often comes with the blending of political anthropology's concerns with power and contestation and structuralist literature's concerns with cosmology, ritual, and human-nonhuman relations. The second author I highlight in this section is Mario Blaser and his book *Storytelling Globalization from the Chaco and Beyond* (2010). In this work Blaser describes his fieldwork among the Yshiro peoples in Paraguay and how they have absorbed globalization. For the author, modernity is an oppressive human condition that is supported by three central pillars: 1) the dualistic distinction between nature and culture/society (akin to de la Cadena's argument); 2) unidirectional linear temporality; and 3) the colonial difference between modern peoples and nonmodern peoples (4). The ultimate presumption underlying the modernization project is that modernity is an evolutionary achievement that only those in the West have obtained and that they are now transplanting to diverse areas around the world with variable success. Those in the West then attempt to study the beliefs of the indigenous 'other' without recognizing their own following of subject-object dualism. Consequently, Blaser wants to abandon modernist ontological promises and instead to embrace the 'pluriverse' that is accessible through a

less oppressive regime of truth.[12] In order to achieve this, the author proposes an ethnography of globalization understood as 'storytelling', which is meaningful for his studies with the Yshiro because of their emphasis on the performative. This performative aspect, in fact and according to Blaser, is what differentiates political ontology from other ontological inquiries. In an article on the subject, he writes "political ontology is not concerned with a supposedly external and independent reality (to be uncovered or depicted accurately); rather, it is concerned with reality making, including its own participation in reality making. In short, political ontology is concerned with telling stories that open up a space for, and enact, the pluriverse" (2013, 552-553). The current modernist scientific model, however, would not allow such an interpretive pluralism because of its pretensions to objectivity and exhaustivity.

The main argument of Blaser's book is that the Yshiro, confronted with the possibility for development projects and the like, have practical demands, but they also refuse to become victims to capitalist exploitation. In an effort at sovereignty, they recognize their ability to develop relationships with non-indigenous peoples in symmetrical ways that lend themselves to reciprocal exchanges. Although this could be seen as opportunistic and falling in line with hegemonic global consciousness, the use of ontological theory can help us to understand that the Yshiro merely have an alternative moral logic that contrasts radically from the modernist project. This is important because for Blaser, modernity is the dominant trajectory that has divided and ordered the world as we know it, including marking the Indian as backward, traditional, and close to nature

[12] Here we see the decolonial underpinnings of Blaser's argument, and of political ontology in general.

(55). But rather than merely proposing a view of multiple modernities, the author guides the readers towards understanding the various ontologies involved, including our own, and toward understanding the power hierarchies at play. Furthermore, he writes elsewhere that these power hierarchies have hugely detrimental effects on other worlds: "the performance of a modern world in which the distinction between Nature and Culture constitutes the ontological bedrock of a system of hierarchies between the modern and the non-modern necessarily involves keeping at bay the threat posed to it by the existence of worlds that operate on different ontological premises, and this has been done by denying these worlds any real existence in their own terms" (2009, 888). Knowledge, Blaser argues, is significant because one governs according to what one takes to be true knowledge about the world. In other words, one's ontology informs one's way of governing. Although a simple statement, Blaser points out the importance of understanding it, saying that "Throughout this book I address these questions by focusing on how the modern regime of truth has produced, or has tried to produce, objects of government and the institutions and values through which these are governed; and, in turn, how these objects of government have responded and in the process transformed those institutions and values meant to govern them" (6). In order to adequately contest the regime of truth, we must first understand the knowledge, 'truths', and stories that support that regime, for knowledge is the careful shaping of a world through storytelling (28).

The pluriverse that Blaser refers to is also inherently political, he writes, as well as real and discursive. One sees notes of Foucauldian discourse in the author's writings, including the themes of discourse, contestation, performance, and knowledge production.

In particular, Blaser emphasizes the embodied performance of ontology, stressing that it is not merely words (myths/stories) or thoughts that create knowledge, but also the enactment of those words and thoughts. Elsewhere Blaser argues: "if ontology refers to ways of worlding, my own formulation of ontology constitutes a way of worlding…. But, as with any proposition, to hold it needs to be enacted; this is where ontology becomes political ontology" (2014, 54). He also makes a similar argument to de la Cadena concerning the division between nature and culture, writing that "In the pursuit of Progress, almost any kind of intervention in Nature was considered legitimate. Of course, by legitimizing such intercessions, liberalism implicitly sanctioned intervening in the lives of humans who in modern man's view were closely associated to Nature" (49). Indigenous peoples were not considered fully human and were othered in colonial and more recent narratives. Instead, the imagination Indian proliferated in Western discourses, and "In these imaginations, Indians were nature-like entities characterized by a lack of volition, and as such, their actions could not be more than the expression of their nature. Accompanying these imaginations was the presumption that the 'nature' of the Indians was knowable for Europeans" (55).

The political implications of Blaser's writing show us that alternatives to modernity and globality exist and have become sufficiently well known to begin to challenge Western narratives and 'reasonable politics',[13] as he refers to elsewhere (Blaser 2016). Indigenous peoples and their increasing political mobilization, especially in Latin

[13] Blaser's use of 'reasonable politics' or 'politics as usual' refers to "the modernist assumption of one world with multiple perspectives on it," which "operates on the basis of turning differences into perspectives on the world" (2016, 549). This then allows those perspectives to be ranked and for some to be erased, destroyed, etc.

America, allow for those hegemonic narratives to be challenged and contested, providing us with the opportunity to be reflexive about the ontologies and stories that guide us and to begin to approach understanding ontologies foreign to us. A common pitfall, however, for this type of argument is assuming that then all indigenous narratives or worldings provide a sort of saving grace for those in the West and aligned with the hegemonic ontology of modernity, giving us tools to get outside of the modernist worldview. Blaser makes sure to acknowledge this, however, and explains that "Political ontology is intended neither as a pedagogic project to illuminate a reality that deficient theorizing cannot grasp, nor as a proselytizing project to show the virtues of other, nonmodern blueprints for a good life. Such reading would confuse an attempt to carve out a space to listen carefully to what other worldings propose with an attempt to rescue and promote those worldings as if we knew what they are about" (559). Not only would such a project not work, it would also only fuel and support the hegemonic discourses already in play, further erasing and subordinating other forms of modernity. This is a major aspect of the decolonization argument, epitomized when Tuck and Yang (2012) write that decolonization "is not converting Indigenous politics to a Western doctrine of liberation" (21).

Summary of the Third Trend

Blaser and de la Cadena take on an enormous challenge when trying to bring together the theoretical arguments from both structuralism and political anthropology, sometimes making them difficult to understand and follow. They do not always succeed at avoiding the shortcomings of these anthropological trajectories—for instance, neither

draws much from their respective ethnographies of indigenous peoples in Paraguay and Peru, and their ontological arguments encourage nostalgia akin to noble savagery—but they certainly have begun the attempt to draw together these seemingly opposing approaches. The ontological trend in anthropology and indigenous studies, however, has been critiqued as merely a rehash of the structuralist emphasis on 'culture'.[14] Another strong critique directed towards ontology is that it tends to redirect our focus to radical difference, encouraging the idea that we cannot truly know others and thus destabilizing the efforts to study them in the first place. As Bessier and Bond (2014) write,

> The critical claims of ontological anthropology depend on disavowing…complex temporalities, overlooking how past ethnological descriptions can set the footings for what now counts as ontological alterity. This oversight implies that ontological anthropology, in its eagerness to avoid the overdetermined dualism of nature-culture, may reify the most modern binary of all: the radical incommensurability of modern and nonmodern worlds. (442)

In some ways, de la Cadena's work seems to encourage this view, especially with her emphasis on partial connections and translations. Furthermore, as Terence Turner (2009) critiques, one major strand of anthropological ontology depends largely on an Amerindian ontology that paradoxically reinscribes the terms it claims to overturn. For Turner, this is motivated by 'the crisis of late structuralism', wherein the agenda of ontological theorists such as Descola and Viveiros de Castro is to reinvigorate structuralism by addressing "the nature of the mentality of natural beings" (14). Bessire and Bond further explain that this indigenous ontology is "figured in ways that do not contradict but constitute the terms of the 'modern, Western, European' ontology it is

[14] However, Blaser addresses this critique elsewhere in writing that "Culture is an inadequate concept for dealing with difference not only because it is thin but also because it takes for granted its own ontological status" (2013, 550; see also Blaser 2009).

invoked to disprove. In his focus on transgressing this binary, the ontologist may create it anew" (2014, 443). They complain that the ontological turn replaces ethnography of the actual with a sociology of the possible (449).

Despite these critiques, though, political ontology theory still appears to be the best way to approach bridging the gap between the camps of structuralism and political economy. Blaser in particular addresses some of these critiques. For instance, he speaks to the troublesome and renewed imperialist idea that Westerners must look to non-modern forms of being in order to save ourselves. He writes that the crises of Euro-modernity and its progressive loss of hegemonic power—although not of dominance—"leads many of us who have been trained and raised within its ontological armature to consider that there are no **'**modern solutions for modern problems**'** (Santos 2002, 13) and therefore that we must seek a solution outside of it." He continues: "In some cases, but not always, this leads to a re-edition of the myth of the noble savage: in our desperation to find a way out we take whatever we consider **'**Other**'** as the panacea" (2009, 892). However, he qualifies that not all ontological analyses lead to such a conclusion. And because political ontology has its foundation in modernity/coloniality studies and decolonization, this project is inherently important for understanding and getting away from the hegemonic role of Euro-modernity. Blaser demonstrates that political ontology connotes two interrelated things: "On the one hand, it refers to the politics involved in the practices that shape a particular world or ontology. On the other hand, it refers to a field of study that focuses on the conflicts that ensue as different worlds or ontologies strive to sustain their own existence as they interact and mingle with each other" (2009, 877). And because Euro-modernity is so hegemonic, it features most prominently among other

ontologies. This makes the decolonizing effort—that is, the effort to reveal EuroAmerica's history of oppression and land dispossession and for indigenous peoples to retake control of state and territory—vitally important.

Political ontology's foundation in decolonization theory serves as hopeful fodder for future approaches. Decolonization is often seen, generally speaking, as an effort to move beyond racialized systems of servitude and structural inequalities to a new, more equitable society (Postero, in press). The discourse of decolonization draws attention to past injustices, especially those enacted upon indigenous peoples, and the EuroAmerican forms of knowledge, power, and subjectivities that persist into the contemporary era. Catherine Walsh (2007) speaks to this when she writes, "Of course, the problem is not with the existence of such frames but rather with the ways they have historically worked to subordinate and negate 'other' frames, 'other' knowledge, and 'other' subjects and thinkers" (224). A key influential figure for the decolonial perspective is Franz Fanon, who argued that decolonization was an inherently violent process through which society would be transformed and new decolonized subjects would be created (Fanon 1963). This focus on the 'subjectivity of the colonized' calls on colonized subjects to decolonize themselves and their ways of thinking, indicating that colonization goes so deep as to become psychologically embedded. Quijano (2007) makes this point when he writes: "This relationship [between the dominated and the dominating] consists, in the first place, of a colonization of the imagination of the dominated; that is, it acts in the interior of that imagination, in a sense, it is a part of it" (169). Other authors take a more extreme stance that goes beyond altering settler-colonialist thinking. These writers assert that decolonization must eliminate settler property rights and settler sovereignty through the

abolition of land as property and through upholding the sovereignty of Native land and people (Tuck and Yang 2012).

There are many differences between varying branches of decoloniality, but their collective contribution to this debate is a focus on the relations between power, knowledge, and culture. They point out how colonial forms of domination obscured indigenous ways of thinking and knowing by privileging Western categories and epistemologies. Quijano describes this imbalance when he writes:

> The emergence of the idea of the 'West' or of 'Europe', is an admission of identity that is, of relations with other cultural experiences, of differences with other cultures. But, to that 'European' or 'Western' perception in full formation, those differences were admitted primarily above all as inequalities in the hierarchical sense. And such inequalities are perceived as being of nature: only European culture is rational, it can contain 'subjects'; the rest are not rational, they cannot be or harbor 'subjects'. As a consequence, the other cultures are different in the sense that they are unequal, in fact inferior, by nature. They only can be 'objects' of knowledge or/and of domination practices. (2007, 173-174)

This recognition of the fundamental dualities at the heart of Western logics—object versus subject, nature versus culture—and how they obscure indigenous ontologies is echoed in de la Cadena and Blaser's works. A fundamental aspect of this decolonial critique is a recognition of the ongoing nature of this distortion in what is termed modernity/coloniality, thus calling for a rethinking of the binaries between nature and culture that underlie capitalism and development.[15] In this view, decolonization requires thinking and speaking from a different locus of enunciation, claiming a new ontological relation to the state and recuperating non-Western culture, language, cosmology, and forms of being. As Quijano claims, "What is to be done is…to liberate the production of

[15] See Escobar 2007, Blaser 2010, and de la Cadena 2010, 2015.

knowledge, reflection, and communication from the pitfalls of European rationality/modernity" (177). For Walsh, this looks like "the building of spaces and places (within the university but not limited to it) for the generation and production of non eurocentric and decolonial thought" (2007, 234). In order for political ontology to be most effective and productive for those marginalized by EuroAmerican modernity and rationality steeped in coloniality, it would do well to stick close to the efforts produced by decolonization—that is, action-oriented, indigenous- and Afro-centered 'thinking thought from "other" places' (Walsh 2007).

CONCLUSION

Kichwa studies are characterized by two categories of literature or analysis: one with a focus on structuralist topics of interest and the other with a decidedly political anthropology overtone. The first group lacks emphasis on power and politics, while the latter tends to undermine the importance of ethnography and unique indigenous cosmologies. I propose that the best way to bridge the gap between these two literary camps is through political ontological literature, which brings to light indigenous cosmology and radical difference while also highlighting how their uniqueness is played out in the political arena.

This approach has been applied to indigenous peoples in Latin America, but not yet to indigenous Kichwa in lowland Ecuador, which application would make for a better, more holistic understanding of Runa peoples, their culture, and their politics. I argue that a political ontological approach would be productive for the reasons earlier stated about why political ontology is productive, and also because of the unique blend of politics—in the form of social organizing and indigenous social movements—seen in Ecuador today, with indigenous actors presenting both their traditional culture and political prowess simultaneously. This speaks to an overarching theme of difference highlighted throughout this paper, a theme at the center of the anthropological discipline. As a response to this constant tension, political ontology recognizes and attempts to honor the differences between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, almost to the extent that those differences make us unintelligible to one another. At the same time, as de la Cadena (2015) argues, ethnographic attempts between these groups are still possible through ‘partial connections’, which theoretically enable intelligibility between

ontologies. In other words, following this model, non-indigenous peoples *can* understand indigenous peoples' ontologies, at least to some extent and through a process fraught with translation errors and equivocations. Structural anthropology writers such as Uzendoski would benefit from such an approach, as it would open the door to political understanding and recognition of power structures. Political economy theorists such as Erazo would also find this approach advantageous in that it limits the imposition of Western ontologies onto indigenous ones while also understanding that indigenous peoples, with hundreds of years of practice, are political actors able to traverse ontologies. Perhaps one last vignette will help to illustrate how a unification of structuralist approaches and political anthropology views can be combined ethnographically for a political ontology of lowland Runa.

I had accompanied Berta Shiguango's family to her *chagra*, a half-hour's hike through the jungle from the family's ecotourist watering hole *Laguna Azul* ('*Waysa Yaku*', 'blue/green waters'). Accompanied by Berta's son Fidel, her daughter-in-law Hilda, her daughter Jackie, and Jackie's husband Michael, we used machetes to *limpiar la chagra* ('clean/de-weed the garden'), hacking down weeds and other plants to serve as *abono* or fertilizer. In one important section of the garden, we cleared away space to harvest cassava roots and then replanted the stalks for another, later season of cassava (which is vitally important for Kichwa hospitality). No ritual was performed for planting the stalks. While I sat peeling cassava with the *chagra mamas* ('garden mothers') Hilda and Jackie, Michael and Fidel, the *aicha yayas* ('meat fathers'), went down to the river to catch fish. Hilda, Jackie, and I chatted about family, food, and the United States, where I am from. We also discussed the sounds of the jungle and the animals within it,

mimicking some of the monkeys and wondering what they were saying. Hilda betrayed a modern Kichwa ontology that mixes the West with traditional Amazonia by describing how the monkeys can tell human beings when danger approaches by certain sounds they make, and she seemed to speak from the point of view of the animal.

But the conversation also turned to matters of politics, land, and government. I learned that the Shiguango family owned this territory because of Ecuadorian government initiatives to give back parcels of land to indigenous families. The Shiguango family inherited this land from their ancestors, and demands on the state by indigenous movements such as CONAIE[16] made it possible for such types of restitution. As Hilda and Jackie described, however, this was not without difficulty. Although they had received this land, which provided nutritional sustenance from the *chagra* and also financial help from *Laguna Azul*, the state was increasingly trying to encroach on the land and re-determine boundary lines at the disadvantage of the Shiguango family. The tone of the conversation was matter-of-fact and curt, with the understanding that indigenous movements served as protection against such intrusions, but also that the state had the ultimate authority.

After slowly peeling all of the cassava, making it ready for cooking later, we packed them into baskets, strapped them to our foreheads, and left the *chagra* to find leaves for cooking on the way back to *Laguna Azul*. We left the *chagra* to its own accord, left to grow and deteriorate and blossom, as is custom in the Amazon. And in the end, we left it with the uncertainty of the future.

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[16] At the time, Berta's husband Sergio was the president of the local branch of CONAIE in Tena, capital of Napo province.

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